



# Goldfinch Gazette

## The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

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

Volume L

Number 9

May 2025

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**DATE:** Thursday, May 8, 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, the speaker completed five field trips in search of Hudsonian Godwits. Beehler 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, Beehler traveled solo by car more than 30,000 miles, encountering Hudsonian Godwits in 10 states and provinces. He also spent time with Marbled and Bar-tailed Godwits, and 33 additional shorebird species. Moreover, Beehler accompanied various shorebird fieldworkers as they studied godwits and other species in remote and iconic field sites. In this illustrated lecture, Beehler 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.

### **Rockingham Bird Club 50th Anniversary Dinner**

All current and former members of the Rockingham Bird Club are cordially invited to attend a pot-luck dinner to celebrate the Club's 50th anniversary. The dinner will take place on **Thursday, June 12 at 6:00 PM** at Park View Mennonite Church at 1600 College Ave in Harrisonburg. A raffle will be held for a fabulous photo of a Bald Eagle mounted on canvas. Raffle tickets will be available for purchase by cash or check only. Please note that the church is a nut-free facility.

### **FIELD TRIPS – Diane Lepkowski**

#### **Lawn Chair Birding trip to Shenandoah National Park, Wednesday, May 7 (rain date May 14)**

We will meet at the Kohl's (2035 E Market St) parking lot at 7:30 am for carpooling from Harrisonburg. 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!

Participants should bring lawn chairs, jackets, plenty of food and snacks, water, insect repellent and a park pass if possible. We hope to depart Big Meadows for home around 2 or 2:30 depending on weather, sightings or what people need to do. Contact Tom Mizell 540-810-5898 [ztomvaz@cs.com](mailto:ztomvaz@cs.com) or Kathy Byers 540-820-6517 [kkbyers77@gmail.com](mailto:kkbyers77@gmail.com) if you plan to attend or for more information.

**Hillandale Bird Walk, Tuesday, May 13:** 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.

## TRIP REPORTS

### **April Hillandale Walk** – *Kathy Byers*

Despite the rather cold forecast, twelve bundled up folks arrived at the park ready for birds and fellowship. Two newcomers added to our good spirits. Sonali and Jim quickly blended into our happy band of birders. The group was quite entertained by several Ruby-crowned Kinglets showing off their “crowns” and occasionally singing. A Brown Thrasher gave us a resounding chorus from high in a tree. Dark-eyed Juncos and White-throated Sparrows let us know that they were still hanging around and an Eastern Towhee announced he was back in town. Matt Gingrich served up a special treat when he heard a Hermit Thrush singing quietly nearby.

As we made our way up the bike path, the wind found us and some of our group made it their turn around point. It surprises me how long it can take birders to cover ground. We had been out there for quite a while and did not travel a great distance.

The remainder of the group was rewarded by some fantastic sightings by Matt Gingrich. Over the next hour or so some of us suspected he was joking as he called out birds soaring high above us. American Kestrels, Cooper’s and Sharp-shinned Hawks, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Double-crested Cormorant and the Bird-of-the-Day, NORTHERN HARRIER, were added to our lists.

A nice group of birders, some fantastic sightings and a total of 42 species made for a great outing at Hillandale. Just imagine what May will bring!

### **Madison Run / Browns Gap Fire Road** – *Greg Moyers*

Eighteen members of the RBC attended the walk at Madison Run Fire Rd on April 12. Forecasted rain showers moved out overnight and we remained dry for the walk. Soon after starting up the road, a Louisiana Waterthrush zipped across the path in front of us. We were able to watch as it picked around in the leaves bobbing its back end as it went. Shortly, we heard a Blue-headed Vireo singing. We were lucky enough to get good looks as it flew in and perched in a tree near the path. We heard a few Pine Warblers as we progressed up the fire road but were unable to catch a glimpse. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker provided decent looks for the group as we neared our turn around point. We also got glimpses of another Louisiana Waterthrush.

Overall, birds were hard to come by for most of the walk. Our luck changed as the remaining members of the group returned to the parking area. Here we heard a Black-and-white Warbler, got

quick views of a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and were able to watch and listen to a Broad-winged Hawk soaring overhead. We only tallied seventeen species but were thankful for a dry and enjoyable morning in the company of old and new friends.

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

Greg Moyers reported over 60 **Wilson's Snipe**, along with **Pectoral Sandpipers** and a **Lesser Yellowlegs** at the pond on Fort Lynne Rd on March 28.

Mike Smith had a **Louisiana Waterthrush** and **Golden-crowned Kinglets** at his place east of Elkton on March 28. Mike saw a displaying **American Woodcock** and heard a **Barred Owl** at Pocosin Cabin Trail on Skyline Drive north of the county on April 1. On April 3, Mike reported that the **Great Blue Herons** are again nesting at the Merck swamp on Rt. 340 south of Elkton.

Randy Cline reported a **Northern Shoveler** at JMU's Newman Lake on March 30. Randy spotted a **Great Egret** at the same location on April 4.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski found a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** diligently working on a presumed nest hole in a snag at Hone Quarry on April 6. Unfortunately for the nuthatch, a **Downy Woodpecker** was seen at the same hole a week later. Greg and Diane also had an early **Blackburnian Warbler** on the April 6 visit.

Cory Taylor reported a **Common Loon**, along with large numbers of **Double-crested Cormorants**, **Ring-billed Gulls**, and **Bonaparte's Gulls** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on April 6. Later that evening, Greg Moyers reported a **Herring Gull** and at least 76 **Double-crested Cormorants** at the same location.

Ken Ranck reported five **Blue-winged Teal** and a **Greater Yellowlegs** at Leonard's Pond on April 7.

Karen Shank reported that an early **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** visited the Shank's feeders west of Bridgewater for multiple days beginning April 7.

Mike Smith reported **Chimney Swifts**, **Northern Rough-winged Swallows**, and four **Common Mergansers** at the Elkton boat ramp on April 8.

Matt Gingerich reported an **American Black Duck** at Lake Terrace in Harrisonburg on April 12.

Peter Norment reported a singing, **White-eyed Vireo** at Hillendale Park on April 13.

On the night of April 13, Matt Gingerich heard what sounded like a **Black-bellied Whistling Duck** calling as it flew over his place near Linville. Matt hoped to record audio for confirmation, but the bird wasn't heard again.

On April 14, Matt Gingerich and five other birders conducted a spring hawk watch at Mole Hill. The group had a banner day, tallying 104 **Double-crested Cormorants**, 151 **Broad-winged Hawks**, three **Bald Eagles**, two **Merlins**, **Osprey**, **Northern Harrier**, and many of our more common raptors.

Herb Myers reported two **Vesper Sparrows**, as well as six **Red-headed Woodpeckers**, at Starry Meadows on April 14.

A flock of **Red-breasted Mergansers** was spotted at Lake Shenandoah on April 15. Diane Lepkowski reported a total of 16.

Following up on an eBird report of two **Forster's Terns** at Silver Lake on April 19, Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski discovered a black-headed gull flying with the terns. After looking at pictures and consulting references, the gull was determined to be a **Franklin's Gull**, marking the third Rockingham County record for this species.

Following up on another eBird report, William Leigh and Alex Capaldi identified two **Caspian Terns** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on April 19.

Greg Moyers reported a singing **Cerulean Warbler** at JMU's Edith J. Carrier Arboretum on April 20. The following day, Alex Capaldi reported a female **Hooded Merganser** on the main pond at the arboretum.

Diane Holsinger had a singing, **Baltimore Oriole** in her yard in Timberville on April 21. Diane reported 12 warbler species at Switzer Dam the previous day, including **Cerulean, Palm**, and an early **Bay-breasted**.

Herb Myers reported his first **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** of the year in his yard in Keezletown on Easter Sunday, April 20, and many first-of-year birds on April 25, including **Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Scarlet Tanager**, and **Orchard Oriole**. Herb added **Warbling Vireo** and **Common Yellowthroat** on April 26.

Mike Smith reported a calling **Eastern Whip-Poor-Will** along Ore Bank Rd on April 22. Ken and Mildred Ranck heard **Whips** and saw a **Barred Owl** at the same location on April 24.

Jonathan Drescher-Lehman reported western **Palm Warblers** at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at JMU on April 23.

Diane Lepkowski reported a **Palm Warbler** at Cook's Creek Arboretum in Bridgewater on April 24.

William Leigh reported a **Black Tern** in breeding plumage at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on April 25.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Annual Election: Report of the Nominations Committee** — *Mike Donaldson, Nominations Committee Chair*

The nominees for the Club election on May 8 are as follows:

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: **Andrew Troyer**

The nominees for Club officers are all incumbents except for Matt Gingerich, who is standing for the Second Vice President position. Matt is a lifelong birder who grew up roaming the fields and woodlots around his childhood home in northeastern Ohio searching for birds. After coming to Harrisonburg to attend college, he decided to stay in this area and has since spent many hours birding throughout the county. Matt lives with his wife and three children on a small farm near Linville. He enjoys raising

livestock, gardening, listening to music, and of course, looking for birds for his Farm List. This year, Matt is focusing on finding birds within the Linville Creek Watershed.

The two-year terms of the two Members-at-Large are staggered, and Andrew Troyer is running for reelection after serving one full term. **Herb Myers** is in the middle of his second term and is thus not involved in this election. Additional information about the elections and duties of the officers can be found within the Club's [Constitution and By-laws](#).

## **RAPTORTHON! 2025**

On May 9<sup>th</sup>, the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watchers team will conduct our 13<sup>th</sup> annual ***Raptorthon!*** Our team this year is led by Vic Laubach and includes Robyn Puffenbarger, Bill Benish, and Rich Wood. We head up to Highland County Virginia for an all-out day of birding. We're aiming to beat our previous Raptorthon record of 111 species including 8 raptor species. We will head out early to arrive at Paddy Knob at the border with West Virginia, elevation 4,478 ft just after sunrise to listen for Ruffed Grouse and fingers crossed, catch a glimpse of a Mourning Warbler on territory. We will spend the rest of the day birding throughout Highland County. It should be a great time for warblers!

We hope you can sponsor our team with a donation of any size. What are you supporting? Half of the funds we raise will support Hawk Migration Association (<https://www.hawkmigration.org/>) programs such as raptor research awards and half will directly support our local Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch. If you've been to Afton Mountain to see the hawk migration, then maybe you've seen the hawk watchers in action! The Rockfish Gap is an all-volunteer hawk watch, and it depends on donations to help keep it up-and-running year after year. The Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch has been in continuous operation since 1976.

The Hawk Watch is very grateful to all past and future supporters. It's easy to support our team, simply visit our Raptorthon page (<https://www.hawkmigration.org/product/rockfish-gap-hawk-watchers/>) and enter your donation amount at the bottom of the page. Alternatively, checks can be mailed care of Vic Laubach to 104 Lanchester Ct, Waynesboro, VA 22980 -- be sure to make checks out to "Hawk Migration Association" -- we so appreciate your support!

Thank you, Vic Laubach Coordinator, Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch and Robyn Puffenbarger, Rockingham Bird Club

## **Best Bird Memory – *Art Fovargue, Club Historian***

Hopefully this headline will remind you to enter your Best Bird Memory since January 1975 in Rockingham County, and you will run and do that before even finishing reading the newsletter! We want to create a good list of memories to be archived so that birders years from now will be able to look back and see what birding was like in the first 50 years of the Rockingham Bird Club. What impressed folks, where the hotspots were, what were some of the uncommon and/or beautiful sightings. Please don't let your best bird memory be absent from this list.

If you want to remain anonymous and not have your name listed as part of your memory, that's fine. There is that option when you fill out the google form. Details at:

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

Skip right to the bottom of the page and click the yellow button if you know the process.

So far, we have 14 submissions; thanks to those who have entered their memory. Our goal is to have at least 100 submissions by the end of June. Seeing as we have over 100 members of the Club, that shouldn't be a big ask. And please encourage friends and other family members to submit. One doesn't have to be an RBC member.

We all have good birding memories; just pick out your favorite. Thank you. And email me if you have any questions.

## **RBC 50 Years Ago – Art Fovargue, Club historian**

The May 1975 Rockingham Bird club newsletter led with the first line of Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem *Forbearance*:

“Hast thou named all the birds without a gun?”

A film, “Life Story of the Humming Bird” was announced. Suspect it was 16 mm.

Field trips to the Todd Lake area, Big Meadows and Hillandale, which included a covered dish dinner, were announced. As this was the last newsletter until September, it was mentioned summer field trips would be announced “via post cards.”

Lastly there was a report on the 1974 Fall Migration at the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory at Dolly Sods. On September 16 a new record was set when 770 birds were banded before noon. Over 7000 birds were banded in the 1974 season, and over 33,000 birds (102 species) have been banded in the 17 years the station has been active. A field trip for the fall was mentioned.

## **Bird Club Book Club**

The BCBC will meet on Thursday, May 15th at 6:00 PM via Zoom to discuss *Eight Bears: Myths Past and Imperiled Future* by Gloria Dickie. Our June selection is *Of Time and Turtles: Mending the World Shell by Shattered Shell* by Sy Montgomery. 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](mailto:elizaihle@gmail.com).

*Beneath these fruit-tree boughs that shed  
Their snow-white blossoms on my head,  
With brightest sunshine round me spread  
Of spring's unclouded weather,  
In this sequestered nook, how sweet  
To sit upon my orchard-seat!  
And birds and flowers once more to greet,  
My last year's friends together.  
- William Wordsworth*





Franklin's Gull – Silver Lake, April 19, 2025

Photo credit: Greg Moyers



Northern Parula – Switzer Dam, April 19, 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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