



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

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

Volume L

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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, Fellowship Hall, at 1600 College Ave in Harrisonburg. A raffle will be held for a canvas print of a Bald Eagle. Raffle tickets will be available for cash or check. Please note that PVMC is a nut-free facility.

FIELD TRIPS – *Diane Lepkowski*

Hillandale Bird Walks, Tuesday, June 10, Tuesday, July 8, & Tuesday, August 12: We will meet at Shelter 12 at 8:30 AM. Contact Tom Mizell at 540-810-5898, or Kathy Byers at 540-820-6517 for questions or more info.

Raptor Hill Falconry in Luray

We have two club trips scheduled: **Thursday, July 24** at 5:30 pm and **Saturday, September 6** at 4:45 pm. We should be at the falconry for about an hour and a half. The cost will be \$37.50 for each member. We must limit each trip to twelve people, so reservations will be required and done on a first-come, first-served basis. Sign-ups for these trips will open June 13 at 9:00 am. To make a reservation please call or text Kathy Byers at 540-820-6517. Please leave a message that includes which date you wish to reserve, your name and the names of any family members you may be bringing. More details will be given closer to the trip dates, but here are some highlights we can look forward to.

Experience Highlights

- First, delve into the rich ancient history between humans and raptors in our Tudor style classroom.
- Learn about birds of prey and their importance to the ecosystem. Here you will be exposed to the equipment, behavioral science, training techniques, natural history, care and management of raptors.
- Look into the eyes of an owl, witness the majesty of some members of our raptor family.
- See an exciting flight demonstration.
- Gain knowledge on current issues facing these spectacular predators and learn some simple solutions you can participate in to insure their future existence.

TRIP REPORTS

Lawn Chair Birding Trip to SNP – Tom Mizell

On Wednesday, 7 May 2025, twenty members and guests of the Rockingham Bird Club enjoyed a “lawn chair” birding visit to the Shenandoah National Park. We gathered at Kohl’s and left the parking lot around 7:45 AM. From Kohl’s to Shenandoah National Park, we observed Blue Jay, House Sparrow, Northern Mockingbird, American Crow, European Starlings and Common Grackles. The temperature was about 61° when we arrived at the Spotswood monument on Route 33 (adjacent to the park entrance station) at about 8:15.

As we began our walk we were met by Abigail Brown from Newport News. She camps in the area and had read about our planned field trip in the Goldfinch Gazette. We were happy to have a visitor to the outing from east of the Blue Ridge. As we walked the service road leading south of the monument, we quickly heard a Red-eyed Vireo. Soon we added American Goldfinch, American Redstart, Ovenbird, American Robin, Brown-headed Cowbird, Eastern Towhee and Tufted Titmouse. By 8:30 almost all of us were trying to focus on a Magnolia Warbler about 70 feet to the west moving quickly about in the forested undergrowth. About this time, Yanni, one of our young observers, spied a Common Black Snake. It was below most observers’ field of view, somewhat hidden by vegetation, and within 10 feet of the group. Nice to have Yanni's observational skills helping look out for us and the snake. Yanni's brothers, Moses and Paco, added youthful energy to our outing as well. Moving along a few hundred yards to the south we added Mourning Dove, Eastern Phoebe and Northern Cardinal as we entered the broad gravel area at a maintenance building at the end of the service road.

We added a Gray Catbird. Carolina Wren, a Scarlet Tanager just singing up a storm, an Indigo Bunting that gave us an iridescent show just beyond the building and all were afforded views of American Redstarts. A Hooded Warbler was seen by some, and it hung around a White-breasted Nuthatch. Kathy Byers and her skilled technique with a neon pointer light helped all of us find the rapid darting about Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Just before we left this special bird oasis, we added Ruby-throated Hummingbird at 9 AM sharp. One of the last songs we heard as we headed back to our vehicles was the melodic flutelike call of the Wood Thrush! What a wonderful song to hear and enjoy in the forest as we walked along a small stream.

So, at 9:10 we were officially on the Skyline Drive headed north towards South River Picnic Grounds. We carpooled with 5 vehicles and stopped at Hensley Hollow Overlook. Pausing at the Overlook we saw more Indigo Buntings and American Redstarts. Broad-winged Hawk and Red-tailed Hawk flyovers added new species for the day and reminded us to look upwards occasionally. Scarlet Tanagers and a Hooded Warbler treated us too. It was Wildflower Week, and several folks observed large, flowered Trillium and Wild Geranium. Cohosh and Cow Parsnip were prevalent along the road shoulders as well. Lots of blooms in abundance this time of May!

Next stop South River Picnic Grounds! We arrived at the picnic grounds at almost 10:00 AM. The sky was blue. I set up my lawn chair and took a seat but guess what? The other 19 were content to roam. Actually, I think they were delighted to roam. So, we held off on the synchronized lawn chair maneuvers until later. As we explored the south end of the picnic area, we found American Goldfinch and Eastern Wood Pewee. For several minutes we heard a Scarlet Tanager calling. Teasing us it may have been calling “Look for me.” Very frustrating as it sounded so close! Some of us searched and searched. Finally, Randy Cline found the brilliant red bird! We added Carolina Chickadee, Cerulean Warbler by Bill Benish, American Robin, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Gray Catbird, Mourning Dove, Black-and-white Warbler, Eastern Phoebe and Blue-headed Vireo by Tom. As we walked down towards the restrooms we were pleased to see Great Crested Flycatcher, Rose-

breasted Grosbeak, Wood Thrush, Hooded Warbler, Blue Jay, Eastern Bluebird and a Chipping Sparrow. We spent several minutes enjoying watching a Redstart flitting back and forth to a nest. We left the picnic area around 11 AM having added about 15 species.

As we drove, both Mike Donaldson and Bill Benish, who were traveling in separate vehicles, heard a Least Flycatcher and communicated same to each other via Walkie Talkie! Off to the Oaks Overlook where we added Dark-eyed Junco, Raven and we were surprised by a Bald Eagle spotted by Mike Donaldson at 11:35 AM.

Some of the group enjoyed Spiderwort and Pink Azalea as the blooms of Spring kept calling out to us in a manner of their own.

We arrived at Lewis Mountain Picnic Grounds at 11:50 AM. It remained a blue sky day and rumbling on the mountaintop was heard. This was not the rainstorm rumbling but stomachs calling. The group surrounded the leader, and this now hungry crew kindly suggested that this would be a good place to eat lunch. Decision made!

Now it was indeed time to break out the lawn chairs. We set up our lawn chairs at the picnic tables in the north corner of Lewis Mountain Picnic area and were dining at high noon. As all were gathered at tables or in their chairs Karen Shank spotted a Blackburnian Warbler in a tall Oak. The sun was bright; the warbler's breast was brilliant and "Old Firethroat" gave us quite a show. Everyone, yes everyone, got a good look at this striking bird. Whoever instigated the decision to eat at Lewis Mountain is due our thanks! Chimney Swifts sped overhead appearing to celebrate our sighting of the Blackburnian. A Broad-winged Hawk flew overhead as we shared desserts. Thank you, ladies! Those cookies were great!

We added Turkey and Black Vulture. Someone spotted an Eastern Phoebe nest under the porch ceiling at the camp store. A Blue-headed Vireo behind the camp store showed us how they gather white paper nesting material. We had 20 species at the picnic grounds! A Wood Thrush called (again) as we left the camp store parking lot. We then headed toward Big Meadows at 1:15.

At 1:30 we set up lawn chairs for the second time. We formed a circle just inside the gate at Big Meadows. This allowed us to search for birds 360 degrees around us. Song Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow, Barn Swallows, American Crow, Goldfinch and Tree Swallows were all around. A few folks went to the Wayside and added Chestnut-sided Warbler, Chipping Sparrow and Northern House Wren. We left Big Meadows after sharing watermelon and enjoying a nature hike to a small pool in the meadow. We were intrigued by the numerous strands of eggs (toad?) in the pool. We left around 3 PM and rewarded ourselves with a stop at Pocosin Trail where many warblers are found and where Karen had spotted a Barred Owl in 2017. Pocosin was a great final stopping place. We added Yellow-rumped Warbler and White-throated Sparrow and had a total of 15 species here. Highlights included Ovenbird, more Blackburnian, Hooded, Chestnut-sided and Cerulean Warblers. Were the Wood Thrushes singing here? You bet!

We arrived at Kohl's around 5 PM having enjoyed almost 60 species. The total for the day on my list was 57. While we sat at Big Meadows, I asked the group to guess how many species we observed the day. Cindy Smoker was the closest as she guessed 53. Such a great day in Shenandoah National Park. A Big Thank You to a FUN group as you each made it special. I'm looking forward to doing this again!

May Hillandale Walk – Tom Mizell

On Friday, 16 May 2025, twenty members and guests showed up for our rescheduled walk at Hillandale Park. As people were arriving Kathy Byers found a Cape May Warbler very close to shelter number 12 and several people got to see and hear it. This day's walk was rescheduled from the prior Tuesday when we had over 3 inches of rain.

The morning was sunny with a temperature around 70°. Our wish list included Indigo Bunting, any warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Baltimore Oriole, Blue Grosbeak, and Hairy Woodpecker. Birds seen or heard as we gathered at Shelter number 12 included the following: American Robin, Bluejay, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Common Grackle, American Crow, show me a Swift, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Wood Peewee, European Starling, American Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal, Eastern Towhee, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Northern House Wren, and Pileated Woodpecker. Not sure we've ever had that many species before the walk even began. Things were fairly slow that first 1/2 hour of walking. (I often use the "voice memo" feature of my cell phone to dictate these trip writeups. This was the unedited version of such a dictation. When I printed and read the draft I couldn't help but laugh when I got to "show me a swift" in the unedited version. I hope it gives you a chuckle too.)

By the time we reached the small concrete slab we added Mourning Dove, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Redstart, Fish Crow and Laurie Yoder sighted a Swainson's Thrush pushing the total species to 23 by 9:25 AM. A Magnolia Warbler appeared at 9:30 and the temperature was 79°. As we reached the Bike trail we added Indigo Bunting, Accipiter, and Laurie and Mike Donaldson spotted a Blackpoll Warbler. A Northern House Wren called. Proceeding west on the Bike trail we quickly added Red-shouldered Hawk, House Sparrow, and Black Vulture. We were now along the south edge of the golf course, and we enjoyed Red-eyed Vireo, Gray Catbird, Northern Mockingbird, Tufted Titmouse and Northern Flicker. My notes reflect that somewhere this morning someone said, "There is a TV." A Bay-breasted Warbler and Field Sparrow brought our total species to 39.

It was 10:50 AM as 10 birders remained from the original 20. It was still sunny, and the temperature was 83°. Tree Swallow, Chipping Sparrow, and Orchard Oriole were next, then an Eastern Kingbird fluttered across the trail. More fluttering flight action. We were gifted by an American Kestrel flying to the west of the trail then hovering over the field for several minutes at different locations.

The last five of the 49 species of the day included Brown Thrasher, Barn Swallow, Eastern Bluebird, a flock of Cedar Waxwings that circled in flight and descended into a tree next to the path and an Eastern Meadowlark. The walk finished up at 11:45 AM. The temperature was about 84° and it was still sunny! Looking forward to seeing you on the second Tuesdays of each month this Summer in Hillandale Park!

BIRD SIGHTINGS

William Leigh flushed an **American Woodcock** along the Hone Quarry Ridge Trail (FR-539) on Shenandoah Mountain on April 26. William tallied 13 warblers, including a **Tennessee Warbler** at Switzer Dam on April 28 and reported a **Ring-billed Gull** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on the same date.

Matt Gingerich's mother, who lives at Lake Terrace in Harrisonburg, reported a possible **Red-necked Grebe** on the lake on April 28. Unfortunately, the bird was unable to be confirmed as it was gone by the time birders arrived.

Diane Lepkowski reported a **Northern Waterthrush** at Lake Shenandoah on April 29. Greg Moyers reported a **Great Egret** at the lake later the same day.

Diane Lepkowski found a **Yellow-breasted Chat**, a singing **Kentucky Warbler**, and **Cerulean Warbler** at the entrance to Shenandoah National Park off Rt. 33 on May 6. Mike Smith reported the **Chat** and **Cerulean** and added **Baltimore Oriole** and **Yellow-throated Vireo** at this spot on May 7.

Matt Gingerich reported a **Short-billed Dowitcher**, along with a **Wilson's Snipe** and **Least, Spotted, and Solitary Sandpipers** at the Fort Lynne Rd pond on May 7.

Cory Taylor reported a **Yellow-throated Warbler** just outside the county on forest road 25 on Shenandoah Mountain on May 7.

Mike Smith reported **Blackpoll** and **Magnolia Warblers**, among others, at his place east of Elkton on May 8 and had **Magnolia** and **Worm-eating Warblers** on May 21.

Diane Lepkowski has had several warblers at her place near Harrisonburg, including **Cape May** on May 8 and **Common Yellowthroat**, **Black-throated Blue**, and **Blackpoll** on May 10.

Greg Moyers reported a **Dunlin** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on May 9. Greg also reported what Sibley calls a "**dark**" **Ruddy Duck**, which has a black head, among the other Ruddy Ducks at the wastewater plant on May 7 and May 9. Matt Gingerich had also photographed what may be the same bird on a pond on Wengers Mill Rd on April 28.

William Leigh reported several migrants, including **Northern Waterthrush**, **Canada Warbler**, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, **Yellow-billed Cuckoo**, **Baltimore Oriole**, and **Willow Flycatcher** at the Crist Farm Walking Trail in Bridgewater on May 14. William reported eight warblers at this location the following day, including **Bay-breasted**, **Blackpoll**, and **Magnolia**.

Diane Lepkowski and Chris Lehman each reported a **Forster's Tern** at Lake Shenandoah on May 14.

Karen Seward reported **Semipalmated Plovers**, **Dunlin**, and **Semipalmated Sandpipers** at Turner Sod Farm on Captain Yancey Rd on May 14. Chris Lehman reported a **White-rumped Sandpiper** at the same location. Upon checking her pictures, Karen determined that there were two **White-rumped Sandpipers**. As many as 12 **Semipalmated Plovers** were seen at this location on May 17. On May 21, Karen found a **Black-bellied Plover** at the sod farm.

Ken Ranck reported **Bobolinks** along Goods Mill Rd east of Harrisonburg on May 14.

Mike Donaldson and Ben Spory reported two **Black-bellied Plovers** at the pond on Weavers Rd west of Harrisonburg on May 17.

William Leigh and Dave Wendelken reported a **Mourning Warbler** at Briery Branch Gap on May 17. Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski reported what was likely the same **Mourning Warbler** at the Hone Quarry Ridge Trail the following day, May 18. They also reported a **Black-billed Cuckoo** at the same location and a **Wild Turkey** on Briery Branch Rd. William Leigh reported **Black-billed Cuckoo**, **Wild Turkey**, and plentiful **Red Crossbills** at Hone Quarry Ridge Trail on May 22.

Greg Moyers reported a pair of **Blue Grosbeaks** at the Northend Greenway in Harrisonburg on May 18.

Mike Smith reported **Cerulean** and **Magnolia Warblers** north of the Swift Run Gap entrance on Skyline Drive on May 19.

Alex Capaldi and William Leigh reported a calling **Olive-sided Flycatcher** at Slate Lick Fields on May 20.

Mike Smith has seen an **Osprey** perched at the Rt. 33 bridge in Elkton on May 21 and multiple times in the week following.

Christina Wells reported **Canada Warblers** at Switzer Lake and a **Palm Warbler** at the Northend Greenway.

A **Double-crested Cormorant** has been hanging out at Newman Lake at JMU during the last week of May.

Perhaps the biggest hotspot for warblers and rarities in May and early June was the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at JMU. Numerous birders reported a **Solitary Sandpiper** and a **Green Heron** at the main pond on multiple dates. As has been the case for several years, a **Northern Waterthrush** has spent over a month at the arboretum. Mike Smith reported **Cape May, Tennessee, and Bay-breasted Warblers**. Other warbler species reported included **Blackpoll, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Yellow, Chestnut-sided** and many others. Several **Swainson's Thrushes** were present in mid-late May. A **Gray-cheeked Thrush** was reported to eBird on the morning of May 24. Later that day, Greg Moyers was able to relocate the thrush and also reported a **Black-billed Cuckoo**. On May 25, Greg reported a **Canada Warbler** and a **Least Flycatcher**. On May 26, Greg located a roosting **Common Nighthawk** and then spotted an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** perched on a snag near the back pond. Randy Cline had also spotted this bird. While photographing the flycatcher, Greg heard what sounded like an **Alder Flycatcher** calling from the pond area. Recordings and photographs were obtained and confirmed that the bird was indeed an **Alder Flycatcher**. Several other birders arrived and were able to see and hear the bird. On May 31, Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski reported a **Marsh Wren** at the back pond. A **Mourning Warbler** was reported on eBird on June 1. Greg Moyers relocated the bird later that afternoon. On June 2, Chris Lehman reported a male Wilson's Warbler. Later that day, Diane Lepkowski relocated the bird and spotted a **Mourning Warbler** that flew in nearby.

Greg Moyers reported a **Brown Creeper** singing as if on territory at Switzer Dam on June 1.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bird Seed Sale Manager Needed ASAP – *Mike Donaldson, President*

Despite our best efforts, we have been unable to find someone to manage the Club's annual bird seed sale. If we can't find someone relatively soon, we will be unable to hold the sale this fall.

The main requirements for this position are to be organized and be able to communicate effectively with the seed supplier, the contact at the fairgrounds for arranging pickup day details, and others. If you would like to see the sale continue, please step up and volunteer your time or encourage a friend to do so.

If you are interested in volunteering for this position or have questions regarding it, please email Mike Donaldson at mike.donaldson@outlook.com.

Treasurers Report – Audrey Shenk, Treasurer

The Bird Club has had another successful year financially. Our current balances stand at \$4,085.46 in checking, \$106.05 in savings, and \$5,547.41 in a Certificate of Deposit. Our club membership stands at 112 members, broken down as follows: 10 free memberships (those who purchased over \$300 in seed at the annual bird seed sale), 12 lifetime members, 43 family memberships, 46 individual memberships, and one student membership. Our total membership has increased by seven over last year's total. We were able to donate \$2,300 to 10 different organizations that are dedicated to bird or wildlife conservation. Enjoy a wonderful summer of birding and hope to see you again in September!

RBC 50 Years From Now – Art Fovargue, Club historian

There was no newsletter for June in 1975 so we can't look back on that. Our 1975 birders were out birding, making memories. Speaking of which, please don't forget to submit your Best Bird Memory. It is important that as many memories as possible are collected so that birders 50 years from now can see what birds inspired us. The funny ones, the uncommon ones, the beautiful ones, etc. Some of these bird species may not be in the area 50 years from now, so let's help them be remembered. And don't you be the one whose niece years from now says "Why didn't Aunt Mary submit a best bird memory?", or whose grandson asks, "Wasn't grandpa a birder with some fun memories?".

We plan to close accepting submissions at the end of June, so please don't wait. Go to this page

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

and click on the button at the bottom. And please encourage any family or friends who you think may have a best bird memory from the last 50 years in Rockingham Co (& Harrisonburg). Help us get to 100 memories. Thank you.

Bird Club Book Club

The BCBC will not meet in June. The next meeting will be on Thursday, July 17th at 6:00 PM via Zoom to discuss *Of Time and Turtles: Mending the World, Shell by Shattered Shell* by Sy Montgomery. Our August selection is *The Birds That Audubon Missed* by Kenn Kaufman. 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.



Gray-cheeked Thrush – Edith J. Carrier Arboretum, May 24, 2025
Photo credit: Greg Moyers



Marsh Wren – Edith J. Carrier Arboretum, May 31, 2025
Photo credit: Greg Moyers

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VICE PRESIDENT: PROGRAMS – Kathy Byers

VICE PRESIDENT: FIELD TRIPS – Diane Lepkowski

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GOLDFINCH GAZETTE – Denise Hoodock

HISTORIAN: Art Fovargue

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