

## Best Bird Memories

Here are some of the first memories submitted to the Rockingham Bird Club for archiving as part of our history with JMU Libraries Special Collections. Hopefully you will enjoy reading these. If you have not entered your best bird memory and still wish to, the submission form is still open. Click the link on the bottom of this page:

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

The Best Bird Memory project was launched as part of the Rockingham Bird Club's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, known as its "Goldfinch Jubilee". In brief, the goal was to chronicle memories from the past 50 years in Rockingham County/Harrisonburg. The participant defined what constituted their best bird memory.

---

Barred Owl  
Hillandale Park-Harrisonburg

Stephani Tusing  
November 11, 2018 4:30pm

A few years ago, I was walking the trails in the woods at Hillandale Park in Harrisonburg. Since the sun was starting to set, I was heading back to the parking lot. I turned a corner in the trail and then right in front of me, I saw a Barred Owl perched in a tree about 20 feet away from me. I froze in my tracks, hoping to not scare it off. It stared at me for a minute, looking more irritated at my arrival than scared. Then it flew off into the woods, its large wings flapping silently. It was the first time I had actually seen an owl in the wild rather than hearing one. I felt very honored to be able to see such a majestic bird-quite an unforgettable experience!

---

Evening Grosbeak  
Timberville

Saraona Minnich  
early 1980's

My Mom (Louise S. Minnich, also an RBC member) and I had just started to feed wild birds. Back then, the Evening Grosbeaks came in large flocks to feeders, arriving around Thanksgiving and staying until May. Mom's favorite color was yellow so we just fell in love with these birds.

---

Red-shouldered Hawk  
Harrisonburg

anonymous  
2021

The hawk was sitting on my in-laws fence eating worms. I did not realize that hawks ate worms, and it was hilarious.

---

Snowy Owl  
Mt Crawford

Stephanie Gardner  
January 9, 2014

After hearing that a Snowy owl was at the White Wave Plant in Mt Crawford, I went to see the owl on the afternoon of January 9, 2014. Experiencing this rare and majestic visitor was a real treat. It was breathtaking when those piercing yellow eyes looked down at me. The way that people help each

other to locate and view birds is a special part of our local culture.

---

Osprey  
Evergreen Valley Rd, Timberville

Allie Sawyer  
Summer 2008

When I was a budding birder at 12-years old, I had a memorable summer with an Osprey in 2008. From my home in Timberville, I noticed a hawk-like bird perched high in a dying, mature American Beech tree. My young eyes knew this was not one of the typical raptors I would see around my home. I flew to my "Birds of Virginia Field Guide" by Stan Tekiela and stealthily crossed the creek with book and binoculars in hand. Unfortunately, I was not sneaky enough for the sharp-eyed bird of prey. Over the following weeks, I dedicated my afternoons to discovering the bird's routine and making myself part of the environment for it. With time, I was able to get closer without it flying away. Throughout the process, I discovered the raptor's identity and developed part of my own - a love for intimate experiences with birds and a curiosity for their routines.

On one particularly lucky day, my Osprey had a Largemouth Bass clutched between its talons and the branch. Time stood still as I watched it rip fishy flesh from the carcass. The combination of familiarity with the strange being that had observed it over the weeks plus being captivated by the meal at hand allowed me to approach the base of the tree where I lounged for what seemed like hours. Even after the meal was concluded, we sat and digested the moment at hand. Suddenly, a stream of white-flecked substance came like a jet out of the sky, causing me to laugh and be glad I wasn't 10 feet closer to the river. While the Osprey didn't fly off in that moment, it felt like it was time for me to go. Stealing glances over my shoulder, I retreated back through the field and across the creek. With one final glance, it took flight. Until tomorrow my dear friend.

---

Blackburnian Warbler  
Route 33 west @ Switzer Dam entrance

Jo Ellen Capstack  
Spring 2015

I attended one of my first Rockingham Bird Club field trips with Tom Mizell leading the expedition. That morning we spotted many warblers as soon as we arrived, but my excitement level rose as he specifically told me where a Blackburnian was located. The colors were vibrant! It was the beginning of my love for warblers. Thanks Tom, you are officially in my memory bank!

---

Red-tailed Hawk  
In the woods behind our home in Harrisonburg

Kathy Byers  
2020 onward

For at least the past five years I have watched Red-tailed Hawks nest in the woods near our home. A pair will start hanging out regularly in late January. Occasionally it is one bird for a while and I get a little nervous. But usually by March a second bird is seen close by. I become obsessed with watching them and have binoculars at all windows facing the woods. With no leaves on the trees they are usually easy to find, but it is a challenge to find their nest if they have begun a new one. I was surprised to learn that they are very particular about which twigs etc to use and realized that they prefer live twigs that are pliable. It's quite entertaining to watch a big bird wrestle with a twig that it has its heart set on! I am quite certain that I could not build a better nest using my hands and I'm certain I'd fail if I had to use my feet! About the time the eggs are hatching the trees have leafed out and the birds have their privacy back. As the weeks go by I laugh to myself when I hear the young birds squawking and begging from their over worked parents. As juveniles are spotted soaring over the woods, I

wonder who might be returning next year.

---

Painted Bunting  
My home in northern Harrisonburg

Mike Donaldson  
2/22/2021 about 12:30pm

On February 22, 2021—a gray, wintry day with snow on the ground—a little after noon, I was in my kitchen on the phone with my daughter and a flash of red caught my eye at the bird feeder. As I neared the window to investigate, it quickly became apparent that the red I had seen was the bright belly of a male Painted Bunting! In addition to its rarity, this bird was extra special for its bright colors and for making itself at home, visiting our feeder for several weeks.

---