



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

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

Volume LI

Number 4

Dec 2025

DATE: Thursday, December 11, 2025

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: RBC member Doug Ruby will present his experience chasing birds for a “Big Year” effort in 2017. Doug Ruby is a retired herpetologist and biology professor.

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

FIELD TRIPS – *Matt Gingerich*

Lake Shenandoah Walk, Saturday, December 6, 8:30 AM: Greg Moyers will lead a bird walk at Lake Shenandoah on December 6th. We will meet in the parking lot at the lake at 8:30 AM. Please reply to fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com if you plan to attend. Lake Shenandoah is a fee access area which requires a fishing/hunting license, access permit or [Restore the Wild](#) membership. Please consider purchasing a permit to support the work of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources at Lake Shenandoah. <https://dwr.virginia.gov/licenses/>

Hillendale Bird Walk, Tuesday, December 9: We will meet at Shelter 12 at 8:30 AM. Contact Kathy Byers at 540-308-9556 or email at fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com with questions or for more information.

TRIP REPORTS

Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding – *Debbie Harrison*

On Wednesday, Nov 19, 2025, nine members of RBC (Kate & Zachary, Alex, Matt, with Micah & Lydia, Greg & Barbara) headed up to the Highland Retreat Saw-whet Owl Banding station. We met the current banders, Ben Spory & helpers Reece & Clay.

The banders allowed us to go to the nets, and 6 owls were returned for measuring and banding. They usually get females (since the call is from the male Saw-whet owl). The banders returned to the nets a second time and returned with 2 more owls.

The owls all got measured and banded! Everyone got up-close looks at these cute birds while learning what data the Banding station captures. Banders recorded information and measurements from each owl, banded them, and held them for photos before releasing them back into the night.

Starry Meadows Walk – *Herb Myers*

On Friday, November 7th, 16 people arrived at Starry Meadows near Singers Glen for a bird walk. It was a beautiful morning but chilly and windy. The birds did not disappoint us. We tallied 33 species. Cedar Waxwings were the winning species with at least 50 counted. The hoped for Red-headed Woodpeckers ended up with four. There were plenty of Eastern Bluebirds as we counted 13. The most common sparrows were the Chipping Sparrows. The only warblers were 8 Yellow-rumped Warblers. Both Black and Turkey Vultures soared overhead along with Red-tailed Hawks. It was a good morning to be out. Thanks to Jay and Sharon Landis for hosting us.

November Hillandale Walk – *Tom Mizell*

The Tuesday November 11, 2025, Hillandale Park walk began with the temperature at 27°. The morning was sunny with winds out of the southwest as 6 members of the Rockingham Bird Club shivered a bit as we gathered at 8:30 AM at Shelter number 12. Nathaniel Shank was the youngest at 5. It was very nice to have Nathaniel with us! Our wish-list birds were Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Fox Sparrows-note plural, Brown Creeper and Red-breasted Nuthatch. Can you guess which three we saw during our 2 1/2 hour walk?

The woodpeckers were busy early as we had Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. By the time we crossed the pedestrian bridge and passed the northwest corner we added Dark-eyed Junco, Carolina Wren, Bluejay, Purple Finch, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Carolina Chickadee.

We searched for the Eastern Screech Owl at the usual tree to no avail, but Mike Donaldson spotted a Golden-crowned Kinglet, and we all got great views of this cooperative little bird. To see the flash of the golden crown is always a treat. As we journeyed on toward the concrete slab we added American Goldfinch, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush (second wish-list bird) and Turkey Vulture. Tom spied a Brown Creeper on the branches overhead and we all got good looks at our third wish-list bird. A Tufted Titmouse and an American Robin raised our sightings to 17 species by 9:30 and the temperature had crept to 31 degrees. It was a COLD 31!

We approached the trail fork near the old log cabin site and were treated to very good looks at a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Mike spotted a Northern Flicker. Then a Northern Cardinal pair flitted back and forth across the trail. About this time some of us got sidetracked by bowling with this year's bumper crop of Osage Oranges. Some adults can't resist selecting a nice round Osage Orange and rolling it down the trail towards an unsuspecting tree. No doubt we will see deer and squirrels browsing on the sticky fruits in the winter months ahead.

A Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-throated Sparrow and the distant calling of an American Crow took our tally to 22. We reached the fork at 9:40 AM. At 10 AM it was 33 degrees and the windchill was 26. Brrrrrrrr. I had to leave, and three brave birders carried on in the frigid conditions. They headed west on the Bike Trail and added Bald Eagle, (why didn't I hang around for another few minutes!) Northern Mockingbird, White-crowned Sparrow and Song Sparrow. These additions took our count to 26 species for the day. Little did we know that the evening would bring a pleasant surprise of a spectacular Aurora Borealis to our area.

Our next Hillandale walk will be Tuesday 9 December. Bundle up well, join us and get in some practice before the Christmas Bird Count.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

After having an **Eastern Screech-Owl** visit her yard water feature in late October, Diane Lepkowski put up an owl box. One week later, on Nov. 3, Diane got photos of an owl occupying the box. Diane later got a video clip of the owl flying into the box.

Just south of Rockingham Co., Bill Benish and Robyn Puffenbarger had a **Fox Sparrow** at their place in Verona on Nov. 7. On Nov. 9, Robyn spotted six **Western Cattle Egrets** in a field just off I-81 in Augusta Co. The egrets then flew over to the pond at the Verona Hardee's.

Mike Smith reported two **Wood Ducks** and eight **Green-winged Teal** at Leonard's Pond off Faughts Rd on Nov. 10.

Herb Myers reported three **Fox Sparrows**, **Eastern Towhees**, and **Purple Finches** at his place in Keezletown on Nov. 15.

Diane Lepkowski reported two **Great Egrets** at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 16.

Mike Smith spotted a **Golden Eagle** flying over his place east of Elkton on Nov. 19.

Five **Red-breasted Mergansers** were reported at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 20 and remained for several days.

A **Bonaparte's Gull**, a **Cackling Goose**, and a **Snow Goose** have been reported at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant between Nov. 20 – 24.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Big Flat Christmas Bird Count Information

Big Flat CBC, located within the South District of Shenandoah National Park, was established as a high elevation count to provide a comparison to the numerous CBC's that are in the surrounding Valley or Piedmont regions. Here is the description from the National Audubon Society's CBC website:

Historically, the count has primarily been a walking count. Many years have had only walking miles, no miles by auto. It is desired that this be continued for consistency's sake and in the spirit of mountain birding. Road access is very limited, but walking routes from road and trail access points can be worked out. Please contact the compiler for this. The area is predominantly forested. Being a mountainous area, it is generally cold, often windy, and birds can be few in number and diversity. From the outset, the count was intended to draw a comparison between birdlife in the mountains and that of surrounding lower elevations. If you're interested in more information about the count, a 50-year summary (1955-2007) is published in *The Raven* 88(2):9-20(2018).

If you enjoy the solitude of winter hiking, this count is for you! The date for the count will be decided based on the availability of participants. Please contact Matt Gingerich (fieldtrips@rocking-hambirdclub.com) if you have interest in participating in this count or would like more information.

A Successful Bird Seed Sale – *Cindy Smoker, Seed Sale Coordinator*

Thanks to everyone who supported the club through the purchase of bird seed. Pickup day ran smoothly with many buyers commenting on the quality of the seed from Lizzie Mae's. We look forward to sharing it with our feathered friends especially as cool weather approaches. Proceeds from this year's sale will benefit several ornithology and conservation programs. Thanks again for your generous support!

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

The Rockingham Bird Club tied up its first year with the December newsletter. It began with this emphatic line from the poem *Quiet Roads* by Lou Ella Archer:

Give me the winding road, and let me stray from the custom-beaten paths.

A photographic journey to Alaska by Homer Mumaw (EMC) was announced for the December meeting. The Christmas Bird Count was announced to take place on December 20 (same as this year!) with all those interested to meet "at 7:30 on the banks of Silver Lake."

A summary of the 1975 Fall migration bird banding at the Dolly Sods station was included. The total number of birds banded was 3889 (72 species). The species with the highest number banded was the Tennessee Warbler with 661. A new station record was set for the Red-breasted Nuthatch with 72 captured. Lastly a survey was included to take the pulse of the membership. It included questions on programs, the field trips, a bird alert system, a county bird sightings record system and more.

Bird Club Book Club

The ZOOM gathering of the Bird Club Book Club (BCBC) for December will be held at 6:00 PM on Thursday, December 18, 2025. We will discuss the book *Rattlesnake Granny Strikes Again* written by RBC member Stephanie Gardner. Any club member is welcome to join our discussion for this book selection or any future book chosen by participants. We discuss a variety of nature themed books and typically meet by ZOOM on the third Thursday of the month. Contact Elizabeth Ihle at elizaihle@gmail.com if you are interested in participating in the meeting.

Christmas Bird Count, Saturday, December 20 – *Bill Benish*

I am happy to report that we have enough participants to help all the field leaders, but please let me know if you would like to join if there is any additional space available. We try to firm up most details by about two weeks prior to the count.

Please note that to have your count data included, we need to coordinate ahead of time in case of weather postponement and regarding protocols. This applies for all participants whether in field parties or as Feeder Watchers counting birds at home (if you live within the circle boundary). To see if you live inside the circle, you can use this link to search for our CBC as "Rockingham County, VARC" <https://gis.audubon.org/christmasbirdcount/>

Thank you and have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!
Bill Benish, CBC Compiler wcbenish@gmail.com



Lesser Scaup – Lake Shenandoah, November 2025

Photo credit: Herb Myers



Northern Saw-whet Owls – Highland Retreat Banding Station,
November 19, 2025

Photo credit: Debbie Harrison

Rockingham Bird Club
9 Louise Drive
Bridgewater, VA 22812



PRESIDENT – Mike Donaldson

VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAMS – Kathy Byers

VICE PRESIDENT, FIELD TRIPS – Matthew Gingerich

SECRETARY – Allie Sawyer

TREASURER – Audrey Shenk

MEMBERS AT LARGE – Andrew Troyer, Herb Myers

GOLDFINCH GAZETTE – Denise Hoodock

HISTORIAN – Art Fovargue

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT – Bill Benish

EMAIL: info@rockinghambirdclub.com

ON THE WEB: <https://rockinghambirdclub.com>