



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume LI

Number 5

Jan 2026

DATE: Thursday, January 8, 2026

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: *Birds of Arizona* presented by Richard Rowe

Dick will share stories and photographs of his recent trip to Arizona. On this trip he saw approximately 130 species of birds, most which he photographed. His program will include photos of many species of hummingbirds, flycatchers, quail, sparrows and other passerine birds.

He recently retired after 33 years in the biology department at VMI. He has served as a member of the Virginia Society of Ornithology Board of Directors, coordinates breeding bird surveys and Christmas Bird Counts, and maintains the “Birds of Rockbridge County” webpage.

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

FIELD TRIPS – *Matt Gingerich*

January Field Trips:

During the first months of 2026, we will be offering Field Trips to some “newer” locations throughout the county. Some of these locations have become accessible to the public just in the past few years, others have been around for a while but are not visited frequently. The hope is that these exploratory outings will introduce people to new possibilities of places to experience birds in our county and allow time to familiarize ourselves with the trails and habitats before spring migration ramps up.

The Farm at Willow Run - VMRC – Saturday, Jan 10 - 8:30 am

The Farm at Willow Run is a 40 acre working farm that raises vegetable produce for the Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, just on the outskirts of Park View. The Farm maintains a network of trails that traverse the farm and allow people to explore beautiful views, a mix of habitats and idyllic scenery in a farm setting. The trails at the farm are gravel driveway and mowed grass paths that change in elevation.

Come join us as we explore the farm and the variety of avian species found there. Hopefully this place will become a regular destination for birders who live nearby in Harrisonburg or beyond!

Please contact Matt Gingerich fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com if you plan to attend or if you have questions. Plan to meet at the East entrance gate at the end of the 1300 block of Harmony Drive. Do not access the farm from Willow Run Rd. There is street parking along Harmony Dr. or College Avenue. Do not block the gate or other driveways.

Hillandale Bird Walk – Tuesday, Jan 13 – 8:30 am

We will meet at Shelter 12. Contact Kathy Byers at 540-308-9556 or email at fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com with questions or for more information.

Crist Farm Walking Trails – Saturday, Jan 24 - 8:30 am

Alex Capaldi will lead us as we explore the Crist Farm Walking Trails in Bridgewater. As part of the Bridgewater Retirement Community, these trails provide access to a mix of habitats on a 20 acre piece of land. The area has forest and meadow habitat that is accessible by gravel and paved paths. This newer location is a work in progress as BRC continues to develop and manage the habitat for aesthetic beauty and wildlife. The large meadow area has potential for sparrows and other forest edge species. Nearby agricultural fields provide open views, and the forested areas provide shelter. I'm excited to see what this place will turn up in any of the seasons.

We will plan to meet along Parkside Dr. near Oakdale Park in Bridgewater and walk the trails from there. Please contact Matt Gingerich at fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com if you plan to attend or have questions.

TRIP REPORTS

Lake Shenandoah Walk – Greg Moyers

Nine members of the RBC attended the walk at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 6. Both the weather and the birds were very cooperative! As we gathered in the parking lot, groups of Canada Geese took off, and we spotted an adult Bald Eagle repeatedly making passes over the lake. Despite the presence of the eagle, several species of waterfowl remained. We spotted a female Common Merganser keeping company with a female Red-breasted Merganser. Their proximity to one another afforded a wonderful opportunity for comparison. Not to be left out, we counted 13 Hooded Mergansers to complete our full set of mergansers. Other waterfowl included a Bufflehead, a Northern Shoveler, a Northern Pintail, Gadwalls, and Mallards.

As we walked the path along the board fence, we heard the chatter of a Winter Wren and a few of us heard and spotted a Wilson's Snipe as it flushed from the reeds near the culvert. At the edge of the pine woods, we spotted Yellow-rumped Warblers and a few of us spotted a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

We then continued up to the dam, where some of the group spotted a pair of Ring-billed Gulls flying over and everyone was able to watch a group of around 20 Purple Finches feeding at the edge of the woods. Other good trip birds included Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Belted Kingfisher, and Swamp Sparrow. We concluded a very productive trip with just over 40 bird species – not bad for a winter day!

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Diane Lepkowski reported **Horned Grebes** and **Red-breasted Mergansers** at Lake Shenandoah, Lake Campbell, and Silver Lake on Dec. 2. On the same date, Mike Smith reported three **Horned Grebes**, **Hooded Mergansers**, and **Lesser Scaup** on a pond on Honeysuckle Rd west of Elkton.

Alex Capaldi reported a **Greater White-fronted Goose** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on Dec. 4. Diane Holsinger and Matt Gingerich reported large numbers of waterfowl at the same site the following day. Highlights included **Ross's Goose**, **Snow Geese**, **Tundra Swans**, **Horned Grebes**, **Red-breasted Mergansers**, **Cackling Goose**, **Canvasbacks**, **Redheads**, **Greater Scaup**, and hundreds of **Lesser Scaup**.

Diane Lepkowski reported 45 **Ruddy Ducks**, a **Northern Pintail**, **American Black Duck**, **Horned Grebes**, **Ring-necked Duck**, **Common Merganser**, and **Red-breasted Merganser** at Lake Shenandoah and a **Bufflehead** at Lake Campbell on Dec. 5.

While Herb Myers was away on Dec. 6, family members reported a group of around 15 **Sandhill Cranes** circling over his place in Keezletown before the birds flew off. Herb was sorry to have missed that! Herb reported a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** and a **Hairy Woodpecker** at his feeder at the same time on Dec. 14 and a crowd of **Purple Finches** at his feeder on Dec. 15.

Evelyn Shank reported a sighting of a **Short-eared Owl** just south of the Rockingham Co. border on Timber Ridge Rd in Augusta Co. on Dec. 10.

Karen Seward reported four **Greater White-fronted Geese** at the ponds on Research Drive on Dec. 11. These geese, and often a **Snow Goose**, were reported through most of December.

Diane Lepkowski had numerous good sightings in mid-December. She reported a group of four **Cackling Geese** at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 11 and has reported as many as seven in the following days. On the morning of Dec. 12, Diane watched a group of seven **Snow Geese**, including two blue morphs, fly in at Lake Shenandoah. This group was reported over the following several days by Diane Holsinger and others at Lake Campbell and the Sentara RMH Ponds. Diane Lepkowski reported at least 450 **Ring-billed Gulls** at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 14 and eight **Snow Geese** at Lake Campbell on Dec. 16. Her best find was a **Sandhill Crane**, first found standing on the ice at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 16. This bird has been reported numerous times through this writing (Dec. 31). It is typically seen very early in the morning at the lake, routinely flying off by 8:00 AM. There have been a couple of days, however, when the bird remained at the lake through the day.

Greg Moyers reported four **Greater White-fronted Geese** and seven **Cackling Geese** at the RMH Ponds on Dec. 28. The GWF Geese are presumably the same group previously reported at Research Drive and the Cackling Geese are presumably the same group previously reported at Lake Shenandoah.

Short-eared Owls have returned to the usual spot along Grist Mill Rd with several reported sightings in Dec.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Avian activities at JMU Arboretum

The Edith J. Carrier Arboretum is hosting bird-related programs on **Saturday, February 7**, to generate interest in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count, which happens this year February 13–16.

The three sessions, all at the Frances J. Plecker Education Center, are as follows:

- **10 am: Exploration Stations** – Multiple bird topics and activities for families to delve into and investigate.
- **11 am: Birding 101** – An overview of local birds and birding hotspots, given by Mike Donaldson of the Rockingham Bird Club, featuring tips on birding for beginners and a brief exploration outdoors to listen and look for birds.
- **12:30 pm: Nature Study—Birds** – Sharpen your observation skills by studying bird anatomy. We will draw a bird one feature at a time, discussing variations and adaptations on each part as we go. No art skills are expected for this guided lesson. Adult class, but children as young as 5th grade are welcome. Supplies provided. Registration is required, as seats are limited.

RBC – the next 50 Years – *Art Fovargue, Club historian*

Our year of celebrating the Rockingham Bird Club's Goldfinch Jubilee, its 50th year, has come to a close. To kick off our 51st year, I offer this poem, *Geese landing*, from local poet B.K. Witmer:

Geese landing

The V's of geese are on the move, I hear them in the sky
honking hoarsely behind the woods, closer, louder,
such a language!— a flying fleet of taxi-horns.

Now they circle the glassy water;
like toddlers, they stick out webbed feet,
waving feathered arms, wrenching the air,
slowing, landing, floating.

All is sudden peace, and I am breathless, totally utterly captivated.

This water-cove jewel is home and hotel to the flying ones.
The heron and the osprey move over— a bit— to make room
for these gusty guests, these angel-strangers who will disappear
in the morning, leaving only tiny white feathers floating
as tip, as proof, as promise.

Brenda K. Witmer

12/14/25

re-worked for Goldfinch Gazette (12/28/25)

Bird Club Book Club (BCBC)

The BCBC will meet by ZOOM at 6:00 PM on Thursday, January 29, 2026. We will discuss the book *The Language of Butterflies: How Thieves, Hoarders, Scientists and Other Obsessives Unlocked the*

Secrets of the World's Favorite Insect by Wendy Williams. In February, we will discuss the book ***Beaver Land*** by Leila Philip. Any club member is welcome to join a discussion they're interested in. The books are chosen by participants for a few months at a time. We discuss a variety of nature books and typically meet by ZOOM on the third Thursday of the month. Occasionally, we switch our meeting day. Contact Elizabeth Ihle at elizaihle@gmail.com if you are interested in participating in the meeting.

Christmas Bird Count (CBC) Update – *Bill Benish, Compiler*

Thanks to everyone who was able to help complete another year of the VARC CBC! The compilation is not yet complete, but my notes show that we had about 43 participants enjoying rather pleasant weather. We had some new participants which is always fun, and we gained a new sector leadership team - Chris Lehman and Ben Spory. These wonderful fellows have also been managing the seasonal local banding of the Northern Saw-whet Owls.

Several parties thought the birding was slower than usual, but we found three owl species and three warblers. These included Great Horned Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, Barn Owl as well as Yellow-rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler and Pine Warbler. As the Pine Warbler (seen at pines surrounding the Montezuma Church of the Brethren) last appeared on our count 23 years ago, we will need to await acceptance of our rare bird report before it will be official. After finishing the compilation, I plan to provide participants with a PDF with the results summary.



Sandhill Crane – Lake Shenandoah, December 20, 2025

Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski



Great Blue Heron – Cooks Creek, December 20, 2025

Photo credit: Joanna Aldridge



RBC Birders at Lake Shenandoah – December 6, 2025

Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski

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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

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