



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume LI

Number 6

Feb 2026

DATE: Thursday, February 12, 2026

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: *Adventures in Amazonia* presented by Dave Wendelken

After taking birding/photography trips to Mexico, Costa Rica and Panama, Dave began to visit South America. Since 2013 he has made 10 trips there capped by trips to Peru, Brazil, and Ecuador in 2025, that were all in the Amazon basin. While birding has been an emphasis, he has also done trips primarily dedicated to butterflies, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Join him as he describes his visits along the Amazon and its tributaries. He will provide tips for travelers and a look at a number of ecolodges and premier natural locations.

Dave has a life-long interest in natural history and conservation photography. He was already birding when he got the Audubon guide to the birds of Eastern and Central America for his ninth birthday and read it cover to cover. He taught journalism at JMU for 40 years with an emphasis on writing, editing, and publication design and production. He contributes regularly to eBird and iNaturalist. He designed and co-edited the recent *Birds of Rockingham County Virginia*.

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

FIELD TRIPS – *Matt Gingerich*

Hillendale Bird Walk – Tuesday, Feb 10 – 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.

Short-eared Owl Field Trip to Bells Lane – Thursday, February 19 – 5:30 pm

Robyn Puffenbarger will be leading an evening field trip to Bells Lane near Staunton. We will carpool down to Bells Lane to meet Allen Lerner of Augusta Bird Club to access private property to watch the Northern Harriers settle down for the evening while the Short-eared Owls get up to feed. Meet at 5:30 PM at the I-81 Exit 240 Park and Ride (Bridgewater Exit) to carpool to Bells Lane off Woodrow Wilson Parkway in Staunton. Dress warmly! We will have a rain date of February 21.

Space is limited to 15 participants. Carpooling is necessary to limit the number of vehicles at this location. Please sign up by emailing fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com Please let us know if you are able to drive and have room for extra passengers.

Bald Eagle Trip to Kimsey Run – Saturday, February 21 – 8:00 am

Randy Cline will lead a trip to Kimsey Run in West Virginia to view Bald Eagles on Saturday, February 21, 2026. We will meet to carpool at the J. Frank Hillyard Middle School parking lot at 226 Hawks Hill Dr in Broadway at 8:00 AM.

Bring warm clothes, water, and food. We should be back by approximately 2:00 PM. Please contact Randy directly if you are going via email (randy_cline@comcast.net) or phone 540.442.0348.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Bird Walk – Kathy Byers

A group of six bundled-up birders enjoyed a winter walk in the park. Our usual leader, Tom Mizell, was unable to attend. He was missed, but his dedicated followers tried to do him proud. The weather was not bad for January, with a starting temp of 28 degrees, blue skies and no significant wind. Birding in the winter seems to require a bit less listening, which was good as most of us had our ears covered! With bird sightings a bit fewer and farther between than in the spring, the relaxed group enjoyed chatting and sharing bird stories.

Our local winter resident birds showed up and reminded us that even these common species are fun to watch. A Red-bellied Woodpecker worked diligently on a broken branch, a Downy Woodpecker was excavating a nice size hole, and Mockingbirds appeared to be on guard duty for the sparrows. The group was treated to a pair of Brown Creepers, a couple of Golden-crowned Kinglets and a few Yellow-rumped Warblers showing their bright yellow patches. While White-crowned Sparrows failed to show, Song and Field Sparrows made the list.

A total of 27 species, sunshine and camaraderie made for a nice outing at Hillandale. Hope to see you in February.

The Farm at Willow Run - VMRC - January 10 – Matt Gingerich

On a rainy and cold morning, nine participants met at The Farm at Willow Run that is owned by Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community. While waiting for everyone to arrive, we practiced keeping our binoculars dry and looked for birds around the main gate. Several sparrows were foraging in the Chicory stalks - White-crowned, Song, Field and White-throated Sparrows. An adult Red-shouldered Hawk flew up and landed on a corner post of the tall deer fence that surrounds the gardens.

Down the lane, Cooper's Hawk flew ahead of us and perched in a tall Locust tree. Surely, this bird was hungry, and it knew there were birds around to hunt. Unfortunately for us, it likely scared many of the birds into hiding. The hawk kept moving ahead of us throughout the morning and likely suppressed bird activity more than the rain did.

From the hill-top viewing area, we looked out across the valley to the north. Across the way, several dark objects moved along a gravel driveway. A flock of 25 Wild Turkeys worked their way across the

hillside. It has been my experience that I often see turkeys on rainy, overcast days. Today was perfect for them!

At the bottom of the farm is an old, empty pond that has some short willow trees and cattails growing around the edges. It is a prime location for sparrows, and we were amazed to see a flock of almost 30 Song Sparrows and a handful of Field Sparrows hiding along the edge of the empty pond.

As we made our way back toward our starting point, the rain started to really pick up. We didn't spend much time searching the wooded ravine below the gardens, but this area has some very nice wooded edge habitat. We speculated about what kinds of birds might be found here in winter and in spring migration. This area is at the north end of a long, wooded hillside. In spring, it might serve as a funneling point for migrating songbirds that pause before they head out over the open valley to the north. Perhaps we will have to plan to come back in May and see what we find!

BIRD SIGHTINGS

The four **Greater White-fronted Geese** at the Innovation Village pond on Research Drive, which Karen Seward originally reported on Dec. 11, continued to be reported into early January.

The **Sandhill Crane** that Diane Lepkowski found at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 16. has continued to be consistently reported through Jan. 23. The bird typically roosts at the lake and takes off prior to 8:00 AM most mornings. We have not gotten any reports from the lake since the snow and ice storm on Jan. 24-25. Hopefully the crane weathered the storm!

Matt Gingerich's mother alerted him to six **Ross's Geese** at Lake Terrace in Harrisonburg on Jan. 1. On Jan. 2, Matt reported eight **Ross's Geese** and four **Snow Geese** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant. On Jan. 5, Matt counted an incredible 62 **Snow Geese** with the continuing eight **Ross's Geese** at the same location.

Diane Lepkowi had **Great Horned Owls** at her home east of Harrisonburg on Jan. 3.

Matt Gingerich reported a **Lapland Longspur** on Nicholson Rd near Elkton on Jan. 3.

Greg Moyers heard a **Virginia Rail** and a **Great Horned Owl** at Lake Shenandoah on Jan. 5. Greg watched the **Sandhill Crane** fly in for the night at 5:25 as he returned to his car.

Diane Lepkowski reported **Northern Pintails**, **American Black Ducks**, and **Gadwall** at Lake Shenandoah on Jan. 17.

Huck Hutchens found a **Tundra Swan** at the North River bridge in Port Republic on Jan. 11.

Diane Holsinger reported a **Common Goldeneye** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on Jan. 23.

The snow and ice storm on Jan. 24-25 brought several good birds into the area. Tim Showlter Ehst found a **Snow Bunting** on Lumber Mill Rd west of Dayton on Jan. 27. Many birders were able to see the bird on the 27th and 28th. While chasing the **Snow Bunting**, Chris Lehman found a **Lapland Longspur** on Lumber Mill Rd on Jan. 27. Bruce Stambaugh reported a flock of **Lapland Longspurs** around the corner on W. Dry River Rd on the same date.

Herb Myers had a number of good yard birds at his place in Keezletown on Jan. 27, including **Eastern Towhee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Purple Finches,** and **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.**

Bill Benish and Robyn Puffenbarger hosted a **Yellow-headed Blackbird** at their place in Verona on Jan. 27.

Cory Taylor reported a **Bald Eagle** chasing a **Golden Eagle** on Lumber Mill Rd on Jan. 28.

Ben Spory reported a **Common Goldeneye**, along with **Northern Pintail, American Black Duck,** and **Gadwalls** at Silver Lake On Jan. 28. William Leigh added a **Canvasback** and **Buffleheads** on Jan. 29, and on Jan. 31, the lake was hosting **Lesser Scaup**, at least seven **Canvasbacks** and 29 **Red-heads.**

Mike Smith reported at least 45 **Horned Larks** on Model Rd near Elkton on Jan. 29. On Jan. 30 Mike had two **Fox Sparrows** and a **Hermit Thrush** at his place east of Elkton.

Karen Seward found a **White-winged Scoter** hanging with a group of **Common Mergansers** on the river at Captain Yancey Rd south of Elkton on Jan. 29.

Matt Gingerich reported a **Common Merganser** at Lake Terrace on Jan. 31.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Grants up to \$1,000 each to celebrate Biodiverse Birders – *Mike Donaldson, President*

The Virginia Society of Ornithology seeks to increase access to the joy of connecting with nature through birds by engaging historically underserved communities—including but not limited to Minorities, Tribes, LGBTQ, disability, and youth groups—in birding activities. Examples of grant awards are presentations on traditional Tribal relationships with birds; organizing a birding walk during Black Birders Week (May), Pride Month (June), or any other time; or organizing a local bird club, or a class on birding accessible to people of all ages and skill levels, or a K–12 school field trip to identify local birds and their habitats. Costs of transportation, binoculars, field guides and information handouts, or other expenses to support proposed activities can be included.

For application details, deadline, where to send a proposal, and a link to this flier, please go to the Outreach Grants section of the [VSO Scholarships and Grants webpage](#).

Treasurer's Report – *Audrey Shenk*

At the latest RBC Executive Committee meeting in mid-January, the committee agreed to make donations to the following organizations using the proceeds from our annual Bird Seed Sale:

- The Wildlife Center of Virginia (the organization that cares for sick or injured wildlife in our area)
- American Bird Conservancy (conserving native birds and their habitats throughout the Americas)
- Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (protecting migrating birds)
- The Center for Conservation Biology at The College of William & Mary (preparing future ornithologists)
- Massanutten Regional Library (in honor of long-time Bird Club members who passed away in the previous year)
- Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia (promoting conservation of our local birds and their habitats)

- Community Cloud Forest Conservation (working in Guatemala to alleviate poverty and protect the cloud forests where many of our local birds spend the winter)
- Kaua'i Forest Bird Recovery Project (protecting endangered native birds in Hawaii)
- Motus (an international research community working together to study the movement and behavior of birds, bats, and insects, sponsored by Birds Canada)
- Smithsonian's Virginia Working Landscapes (promoting the conservation of native biodiversity and sustainable land management in Virginia)

Thank you for your support for our annual fundraiser. By purchasing bird seed and volunteering on distribution day, you make these donations possible. Happy safe birding in 2026!

RBC Upcoming Election of Officers – *Art Fovargue, Club historian and Nominating Committee Chair*

At the last Executive Committee meeting, in a moment of inattentiveness or weakness, I volunteered to chair the Nominating Committee for the upcoming (May) RBC election of officers. Per our [Constitution and By-Laws](#), the process starts at the March meeting when the President announces the Nominating Committee Chair. The job of the Nominating Committee is to “prepare a slate of one nominee for each office” that is up for election.

The offices up for election are President, First Vice President – Programs, Second Vice President – Field Trips, Secretary, Treasurer and one Member-at-large position. These positions are open every year and a description of their duties can be found in our Constitution and By-laws.

Seeing no harm in getting the ball rolling before March, if there is anyone interested in serving on the Nominating Committee with me, or just wants more information on the committee and process, please send me a message via the [RBC Contact page](#).

Bird Club Book Club (BCBC)

The BCBC will meet by ZOOM at 6:00 PM on Thursday, February 19, 2026. We will discuss the book *Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America* by Leila Philip. In March, we will discuss *Raising Hare: a memoir* by Chloe Dalton. 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) Reporting Completed – *Bill Benish, Compiler*

Our count was held on December 20, 2025. Thanks again to 44 people who participated in our “VARC” (Rockingham County) CBC (Christmas Bird Count). We found 8,892 individual birds made up of 78 species. Last year we had 2 species fewer but 2,235 more individuals.

Our four highest counts of individuals of a species included two non-native- European Starling (4,235) and Rock Pigeon (786) - and next highest, tied at 240 were Mourning Dove and Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco.

The following eight species were represented by only one individual: Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Pine Warbler, and Savannah Sparrow.

By publication of this month's Goldfinch Gazette, I should have finished emailing a PDF summary to participants. You may also email me (wcbenish@gmail.com) if you would like a copy.

A Note from Robyn Puffenbarger and Bill Benish

At our home in Augusta County, we had a 24-hour wonder appear due to the big snow. At about noon on Tuesday, January 27, a Yellow-headed Blackbird first appeared amongst about 250 other blackbirds such as Brown-headed Cowbirds, Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles and Rusty Blackbirds. It spent about 10 minutes feeding, then appeared only occasionally through the following morning, not to be re-sighted since. This was a first for Winter in the Augusta County area, but it was the fifth record overall with one Fall and three Spring records. We keep hoping to see more sightings of this bird in Virginia in the eBird rare bird alerts, but so far, nothing has popped up. It was a great reminder to us to keep our eyes open for rare visitors! [See photos below.]



Yellow-headed Blackbird – Augusta County, January 27, 2026

Photo credit: Robyn Puffenbarger



Yellow-headed Blackbird – Augusta County, January 27, 2026
Photo credit: Vic Laubach



Yellow-headed Blackbird – Augusta County, January 27, 2026
Photo credit: Ann Cline

Rockingham Bird Club
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PRESIDENT – Mike Donaldson

VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAMS – Kathy Byers

VICE PRESIDENT, FIELD TRIPS – Matthew Gingerich

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GOLDFINCH GAZETTE – Denise Hoodock

HISTORIAN – Art Fovargue

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT – Bill Benish

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