



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume LI

Number 6

Mar 2026

DATE: Thursday, March 12, 2026

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: *Seabirds of Virginia* presented by biologist Andrew Rapp from Richmond, VA

Andrew has extensive experience leading pelagic birding tours across multiple Atlantic states and looks forward to sharing his passion for sea birding in Virginia.

Andrew currently works as a Field Zoologist for the Virginia Natural Heritage Program where he monitors populations of state rare animals. He also serves on the board for the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory and acts as the Morning Flight Specialist Coordinator. Andrew has led pelagic birding tours across multiple Atlantic states. He is excited to return to the Valley and share the wonders of Virginia sea birding.

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

FIELD TRIPS – Matt Gingerich

Waterfowl Watch - Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant - Wednesday, March 18th - 6:00 pm

The idea of spending time at a wastewater treatment facility might not sound very appealing to most people, but bird watchers are not “most people”! Here in Rockingham County, we are far enough away from the main Atlantic Flyway that we do not see large numbers of waterfowl on a regular basis. Also, we are not blessed with many large bodies of water that would attract waterfowl. Interestingly, the best location for seeing waterfowl in our area is the large impoundment at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant (WTP) outside of Timberville.

Matt Gingerich will be facilitating an evening visit to the WTP. The facility management has been very gracious to provide a small gravel parking area and signage that directs birders to view the impoundment from outside of the fence. Because of these logistics, we may need to limit the number of vehicles. Carpooling will be coordinated if necessary.

Because viewing is often distant, it would be helpful if we could have some volunteers to bring spotting scopes to set up, allowing people to get better views of the waterfowl. Please let Matt know if you are able to help with this aspect (or if you are willing to lend a scope).

Please sign up by emailing fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com There will be no rain date, because if the ducks like rain, we will too!

Hillandale Eggs and the Equinox Walk – Friday, March 20 – 8:30 am

****Please note the change of day and schedule!****

Join us at Kathy Byers' home (521 Ridge Rd, Harrisonburg) at 8:30 am for breakfast. Around 9:45 am we will head to Hillandale Park and meet at the Shelter 12 parking lot. There we will look for our final birds of Winter until 10:46 am. At 10:47 am our Spring sightings can begin! Contact Kathy (540) 820-6517, Tom (540) 810-5898 or email us at fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com

Pasture Walk - Meadowlark Farm - Linville, VA - Friday, March 27 - 8:30 am

Matt Gingerich will be leading a morning walk at his farm near Linville to explore open fields in search of early spring migrants. Late March and early April is a time when Spring is not yet in full gear, but there are indeed migrants moving. Vesper Sparrows are one of Matt's favorite migrants during this window of time. We will see if we can find one in some open pasture habitat. If not, there will surely be other birds around to enjoy. If the weather conditions are favorable, we may spend part of the morning perched atop a hill and watch for migrants flying over. Hawks, loons, cormorants and more can sometimes be seen migrating overhead in early spring. There will also be spring lambs scampering through the fields!

This outing will involve walking on gravel and mowed paths through fields and pasture. Expect to walk less than a mile through such habitat. Boots are recommended. Please sign up by emailing fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com Directions and information will be sent to participants closer to the time.

Woodcock Trip – Madison Run / Browns Gap Fire Road (Shenandoah National Park) & Ore Bank Rd – Monday evening, March 30, with Diane Lepkowski

Join Diane under the nearly full moon as we aim to find American Woodcocks displaying. We'll meet along the Fire Road at 7:00 PM & probably then head north to a viewing spot on Ore Bank Rd (where parking is limited.) Drive on your own or let Diane know if you wish to connect with others for carpooling (20-minute drive from Harrisonburg.) Park along the Fire Rd, an extension of Browns Gap Rd, just east of the Ore Bank Rd intersection, taking care not to block the road. This is east of Grottoes, just inside SNP. **Please sign up** with Diane at dianelep1@yahoo.com if you plan to attend or have questions. (Include # in your party and your email and cell phone # in case of cancellation/postponement.) Limit: 12 attendees.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Bird Walk – Tom Mizell

On Tuesday, 10 February 2026, six members and a guest traveled the dry pavement and the bike trail as we avoided the treacherous "snowcrete" that blanketed the Valley since 25 January. (See photo on page 6.) It was sunny, the air was still and the temperature was 30°. Our wish list included Fox Sparrow, "long looks" at a Northern Flicker, Brown Creeper, Purple Finch and Pileated Woodpecker. As the top of the snow was frozen and extremely slippery our moment for safety was a caution to be careful. Our guest was Paige French. She is Executive Director of [Blue Ridge Packs and Tracks](#). She

spoke to the Rockingham Bird Club the following Thursday night about track chair hikes that open up exciting outdoor adventures for many folks.

Initial sightings included Red-bellied Woodpecker, Mourning Dove, Bluejay, Fish Crow, Tufted Titmouse, and White-breasted Nuthatch. A Northern Cardinal impressed as red against the background of white snow was striking. An American Crow flew overhead before we headed South on the main park road. Four of the next six birds were Woodpeckers including Danny, Harry, (Yes “auto correct” listed the woodpecker’s as Danny and Harry), Northern Flicker and Pileated Woodpecker. The other two of the six were the highly sought European Starling and Common Grackle. Northern Mockingbird and Carolina Wren pushed our total species count to 16 by 8:50 AM.

A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was our sixth Woodpecker as little birds next paraded into our field of view. The smaller ones included Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow and House Sparrow. Small continued as Dark-eyed Junco and Carolina Chickadee were in the cedar trees paralleling the Bike Trail. We welcomed the call and appearance of a small flock of Eastern Bluebirds that flew from some walnut trees across the trail. A flock of American Robins passed high above the golf course. American Goldfinch and Yellow-rumped Warbler shared their yellow. High overhead a Red-tailed Hawk and Turkey Vulture owned the skies. The golf course glistened as it was still completely snow covered. It had been over two weeks since the big snow! As we neared the school, we added a House Finch singing on this beautiful Winter day.

At 10:04 AM we headed back towards the shelter. As often happens we added more species on the way out. At 10:38 AM Linda Halpern shouted, “Red shouldered Hawk!” Nice sighting! We also had a Field Sparrow. As we paused on the Bike Trail Bridge, Mike Donaldson spotted a Hermit Thrush along the stream channel; an exciting conclusion.

It was 41 degrees as this pleasant walk came to an end 11:00 AM. We enjoyed 32 species. Join us Friday 20 March at Kathy Byers' home for our first Equinox Brunch to be followed by the end of Winter/beginning of Spring Hillandale walk. Hope you will join us for this year's long awaited return of Spring!

Bald Eagle Trip to Kimsey Run – *Kathy Byers, Randy Cline*

This year’s annual Eagle Expedition in WV was Exceptional! For the folks that attend this trip regularly, the warmer weather had us almost giddy with anticipation of the day. And what a sweet start to see eagles from our meeting place at the middle school. Did someone pay that pair of eagles to nest right across 259?

We had learned the night before that the lakes we would be visiting were still ice covered, but we kept our hopes high as we traveled to Kimsey Run. An advantage to the ice was that it required birds on the water to be concentrated in smaller areas. The group was treated to nice views of Common Mergansers, Canada Geese and Wood Duck. A big thank you to Craig Zook for toting his scope around the lake for us. The group was entertained by several burbling Bluebirds and singing Song Sparrows. The scrubby field area also gave us Cedar Waxwings, Yellow-rumped Warblers and Field Sparrows. Long distance views of soaring eagles kept tempting us to head to another area. We were glad we had stayed a bit longer when an eagle swooped in and landed at a possible nest site across the lake.

After seeing 23 species, the group decided it was time to take our chances at Parker Hollow Lake where we had seen several eagles last year. Eight species were seen there adding Black-capped Chickadees and a few more soaring eagles.

We looked forward to eating lunch in the parking lot of the veterinarian's office on 259 as the wooded ridge across the road is a reliable area for lots of eagles. What a show the birds put on for us! Several mature and immature eagles were soaring, perched in trees and skimming along the stream. At times we were unsure of how to count all the birds we were seeing. We all agreed that there were at least a dozen in the area.

Our grand finale took place at the Lost River General Store, which Debbie Turner had guaranteed was worth a visit. An eagle thrilled us by landing in the corn field near us, pulling up a large clump of corn stalks and circling over us to land in a very thick, flat-topped pine tree. The excitement was shared with a few other customers at the shop. After celebrating a great day with some ice cream, the group headed home.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Mike Smith reported 42 **Common Mergansers** on the river south of Elkton along Captain Yancey Rd on Feb. 3.

Chris Lehman reported three **Tundra Swans** at Silver Lake on Feb. 6. Cory Taylor reported an additional three swans on Feb. 9. The six swans stuck around for several days.

Diane Holsinger reported a **Long-tailed Duck** on the river at Wildwood Park in Bridgewater on Feb. 11. The duck was reported along this stretch of river above and below the dam at Wildwood for the next several days.

Matt Gingerich reported a **Greater White-fronted Goose** at Lake Terrace in Harrisonburg on Feb. 14. Matt reported two **Snow Geese** there on Feb. 26.

Our bird of the month (and year!) was a **Crested Caracara** in the Broadway area. The bird was first reported on a state-wide birding forum on Feb. 14. Karen Seward alerted the local birding community and Mike Donaldson relocated the bird the following morning near the George's hatchery on Daphna Rd. The bird continued to be seen in the area, and once as far away as Eden Valley Rd west of Harrisonburg, over the following week. On Feb. 20, Peter Norment reported that he was fairly confident that he had spotted the bird perched along I-81 in Shenandoah Co. near the Bowman's Crossing exit. That was our last report of the bird. Interestingly, it was at the same time last year that Matt Gingerich spotted a **Crested Caracara** on his property near Linville. Perhaps we all need to watch for a caracara next Feb.!

Scott Priebe reported a **Ross's Goose** at Wildwood Park on Feb. 18.

Mike Smith saw a pair of **Wood Ducks** on the Shenandoah River at the Rt. 33 bridge near Elkton on Feb. 18.

Ben Spory reported two **Tundra Swans** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on Feb. 19. On Feb. 20, Greg Moyers reported an **American Herring Gull** keeping company with at least 85 **Ring-billed Gulls** at the same location.

Karen Seward found an **American Herring Gull** at the Turner Sod Farm south of Elkton on Feb. 22.

Ben Spory reported a **Greater White-fronted Goose** at Wildwood Park on Feb. 24.

Mike Smith had four **Fox Sparrows** at his place near Elkton on Feb. 24. The following day, Mike had **Brown Creeper, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker**, two **Common Ravens, Purple Finch**, and his first-of-year **Chipping Sparrow** at his place.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski reported an out-of-season **Gray Catbird** at Hone Quarry on March 1.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RBC to participate in Great Community Give – *Mike Donaldson, President*

On Wednesday, April 22, the Rockingham Bird Club will participate in the ninth annual [Great Community Give](#) (GCG), a one-day online event that promotes charitable giving to 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations located in and serving Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. By participating in the GCG, the Club aims to raise funds to help pay for a number of things, including materials to enhance community outreach programs; equipment for field trips, such as binoculars for those who need them and first aid kits; and supplies for maintaining the Club's trail of bluebird nest boxes at the Rockingham Fairgrounds.

Please mark your calendars for April 22, share the date with your friends, and consider taking this opportunity to donate to the RBC and other local nonprofits.

RBC presentation at JMU arboretum rescheduled

The RBC **Birding 101** presentation, originally scheduled for February 7, has been rescheduled to Saturday, April 18, at 11:00 a.m. at the Frances J. Plecker Education Center at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum. The program will consist of an overview of local birds and birding hotspots, featuring tips on birding for beginners and a brief exploration outdoors to listen and look for birds. (The other bird-related presentations scheduled for February 7 could not be rescheduled together on the same day, so please consult the [arboretum's event calendar](#) for a complete list of upcoming events.)

Nominating Committee – *Art Fovargue, Club historian and Nominating Committee Chair*

Hopefully it has just slipped your mind, that is, volunteering to serve on the Nominating Committee for the upcoming (May) RBC election of officers. Don't hesitate to contact me via the [RBC Contact page](#).

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](#).

Feedback on Lizzie Mae Bird Seed – *Cindy Smoker, Sale Coordinator*

As we begin planning for our 2026 bird seed sale, we'd love your feedback on any Lizzie Mae seed you purchased last year.

*What varieties worked well, and you want to see them offered again?

*Is there a different size bag of a seed you would prefer?

*Is there a seed or blend that wasn't offered in 2025 that you would like to see offered in 2026?

*Do you appreciate the fact that we have offered some specials in the past? Would you be disappointed if we discontinued specials? (ie, 3 bags for a reduced price)

Send this and any other feedback to cindy.smoker@gmail.com. Thanks!

Fabulous Opportunity Awaits! – Kathy Byers

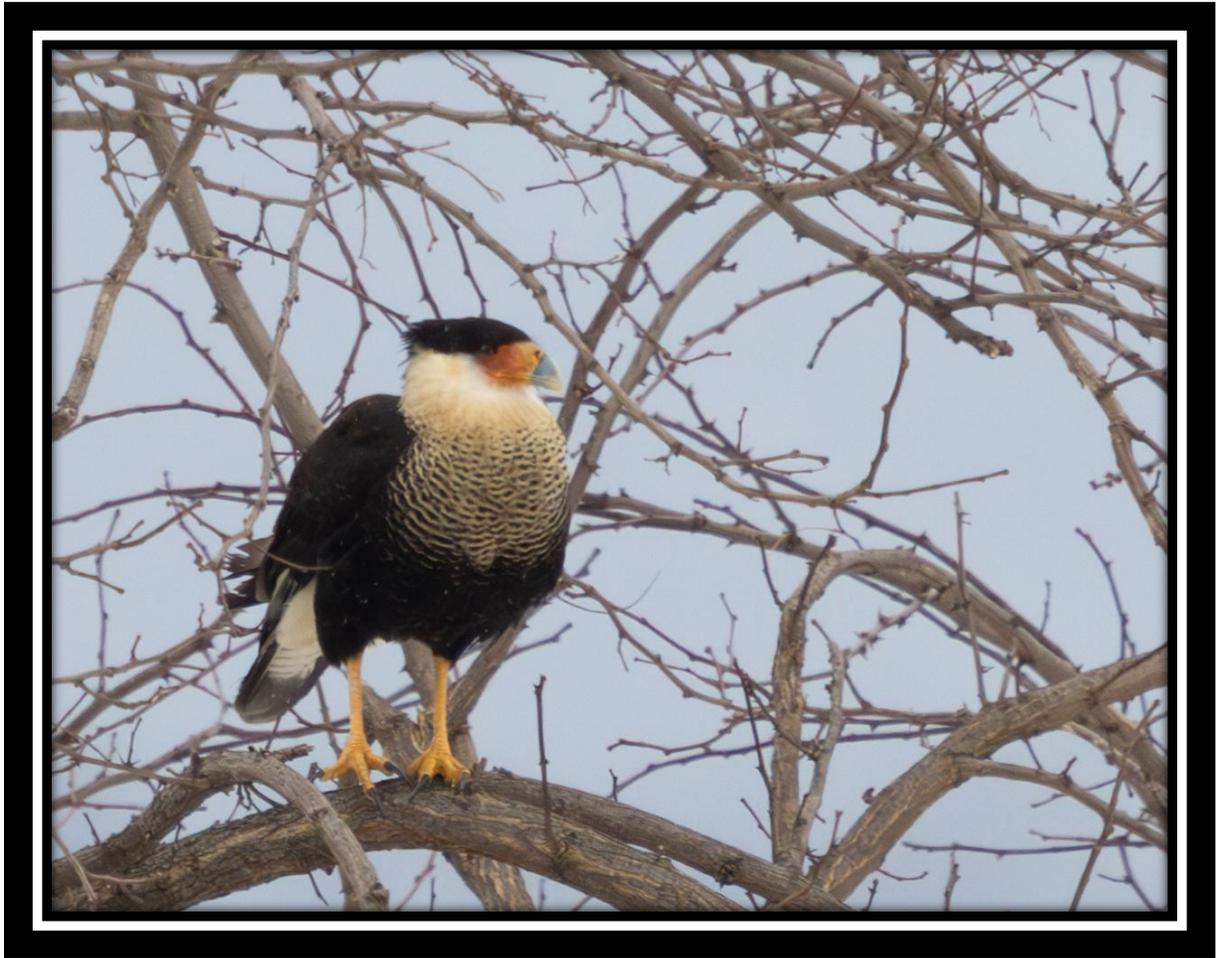
Do you know someone who loves nature but is not able to get out to enjoy it independently? We are excited to announce that the club has been approached by Paige French, the founder of [Blue Ridge Packs and Tracks](#). This marvelous charity organization strives to offer both local residents and visitors with disabilities the chance to experience and be transformed by the natural beauty of this area. They provide specialized track chairs designed to navigate various terrains, ensuring that everyone can explore the outdoors comfortably and safely. We would love to make one of the chairs available for an upcoming Hillandale Walk. Please contact Kathy Byers fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com for more information.

Bird Club Book Club (BCBC)

The BCBC will not meet in March. The next meeting by ZOOM will be April 16, 2026. We will discuss the book *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.



Undaunted RBC folks braving the “snowcrete” – Hillandale Park, February 10, 2026
Photo credit: Tom Mizell



Crested Caracara – Broadway area, February 8, 2026

Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski

Rockingham Bird Club
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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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