



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

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DATE: Thursday, April 9, 2026

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: *Riverine and Backyard Biodiversity* presented by EMU professor Steven David Johnson

In this multimedia talk, Steven will focus on his work documenting biodiversity close to home: across the street on the Shenandoah River and even closer to home at his backyard pollinator garden and frog pond (an ongoing family project). He will discuss how these long-term photo projects have contributed to the educational and advocacy work of conservation organizations.

Steven David Johnson is a conservation photographer and Professor of Visual and Communication Arts at EMU in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. His photography of the natural world has appeared in numerous nature magazines, conservation publications and journals.

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 – Harrisonburg – Tuesday, April 14 – 8:30 am

Please meet at 8:30 AM at Shelter number 12. Bring your warbler eyes and ears as we are hoping for many of our migratory friends to be arriving and in search of birders. Contact Kathy Byers at 540-308-9556 or email at fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com with questions or for more information.

Wildwood Park Walk - Bridgewater - Saturday, April 18 - 8:30 am

Join Alex Capaldi at Wildwood Park in Bridgewater for an early Spring bird walk. Nestled along the North River, Wildwood Park offers open woodland and riparian habitat with scenic views of the river. Hopefully we will have some early migrants that will show up. Maybe the resident Baltimore Orioles will be back by then!

Plan to meet at the pavilion parking area at 8:30. 648 West Bank St. Bridgewater.
For questions or more information, email fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com

Birding Before Work - Wednesday Mornings, April 22, 29, May 6, 13 - 6:00-8:00 am

If you are an early-bird, or if you just dread going to work or school during spring migration, come join us for some early morning birding during the peak of Spring Migration! We will be organizing early morning bird walks on the Wednesdays in late April and early May. These outings will be informal walks through birding “hotspots” in and near Harrisonburg (Hillendale Park, JMU Arboretum, VMRC Farm). Each Monday, we will send out an email with the location for that week. For more information and questions, contact fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com Bring your own coffee and binoculars!

Woodland Wildflower and Warbler Walk - Hone Quarry - Friday, April 24 - 8:00 am

Matt Gingerich and Clair Mellinger will attempt to do the impossible: look up and down at the same time! Can we study Warblers and Wildflowers in the same outing? We will surely try! Fortunately, one of these things doesn't move very quickly.

So, come find out if a Wake Robin is a bird or a wildflower. We will meet at the Hone Quarry Picnic Area parking lot and will plan to walk the forest road back to the reservoir. To RSVP and for questions/directions, please contact fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com Carpooling from Harrisonburg is also a possibility. Please indicate if you would appreciate this option.

Starry Meadows Spring Migration Walk - Saturday, May 2 - 8:30 am

Club members, Jay and Sharon Landis are graciously hosting another bird walk at their property, Starry Meadows. This marvelous place is located near the base of Little North Mountain and offers a mix of habitats and great views. This outing has the potential to be an excellent trip during the peak of Spring migration.

Expect to walk on uneven grass and gravel paths with changing elevation. Mike Donaldson will lead the walk. Space is limited. For more information and to sign up, please contact fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com

TRIP REPORTS

Waterfowl Watch - Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant – Matt Gingerich

Close to fifteen members of the Bird Club ventured to the Wastewater Treatment Plant outside of Timberville on a chilly evening. We gathered along the chain-link fence to scan through the scattered flocks of waterfowl on the large impoundment.

We had several families with young children who were eager to see and learn about these water birds. One scope was set up for even the youngest member (6 yrs old!) to look through. His excitement at seeing a colorful male Northern Shoveler was palpable. The immature Tundra Swan was also a favorite.

Throughout our time, we studied the differences between Greater and Lesser Scaup, watched the feeding behavior of Northern Shovelers, tried to catch a glimpse of a diving Bufflehead in the scope, and marveled at the way the Common Mergansers zipped in over the water as they came in to roost for the night.

In total, the group identified 16 species of waterfowl, including a dapper male Wood Duck, the tricky Greater/Lesser Scaup, some energetic Bufflehead and the petite Green-winged Teal. While not the most scenic outing, it was educational and fun!

Hillandale Eggs and the Equinox Walk – Tom Mizell

The Spring Equinox on Friday 20 March 2026 attracted 23 members of the Rockingham Bird Club, and all enjoyed the changing of the seasons. I hope you see the photo of the group on the pedestrian Bridge! Our bodies were nourished by food and fellowship, and our spirits were nourished as well by nature and particularly the birds!

To begin our time together Kathy and Dane Byers opened their home by hosting a breakfast brunch close to Hillandale Park. There were all kinds of delicious breakfast items! Thank you Kathy, Randy, and Chelsea for the wide assortment of delicious food. While we dined inside birds were outside breakfasting at the Byers feeding stations in their yard. One impressive crowd pleaser was a Red-tailed Hawk on a nest in their backyard. Can you believe their good fortune? Kathy set up a telescope in the kitchen. It afforded all an up close and personal look at the hawk. A Pileated Woodpecker made an appearance too and some of us were sure we recognized it again later as it flew through Hillandale Park as we walked the trail. Song Sparrow and Purple Finch were also seen at the Byers home.

So, after a fun time of fellowship, food and appetizer birds we convoyed to Shelter 12 for the Main Equinox Event! We picked up another birder as we compiled our wish list thoughts. Our wishes included Purple Finch, Hermit Thrush, Brown Creeper, Any Warbler, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Pileated Woodpecker and Chipping Sparrow.

We saw 22 species in the first 45 minutes of birding while Winter disappeared. Birds that were only seen during the Winter included Dark-eyed Junco, Pileated Woodpecker, Brown Creeper, Eastern Towhee, Brown-headed Cowbird, Song Sparrow and the last species spotted before Spring arrived was a White-breasted Nuthatch! Lizzie Turner, granddaughter of Debbie Turner, joined us for her first Hillandale walk. Lizzie is in the 9th grade, and she was excited to enjoy her first sighting of a Brown Creeper.

The first bird of Spring was a Downy Woodpecker. Species that waited until Spring to be seen included Red-tailed Hawk, Common Grackle, Eastern Phoebe, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Mockingbird, Northern Flicker, American Goldfinch and the Fovargue's added a Hermit Thrush on their walk out of the park.

Other species that gave us glimpses in both Winter and Spring were Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, American Robin, American Crow, European Starling, Red-bellied and Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Chickadee, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Turkey Vulture, Carolina Wren, Mourning Dove, Tufted Titmouse and White-throated Sparrow.

The walk concluded at noon with 30 species. We hope to see you Tuesday, 14 April! Please help us welcome back our migratory friends!

Pasture Walk - Meadowlark Farm - Linville, VA – Matt Gingerich

Despite the looming forecast of rain and an approaching cold front, ten members braved the weather to walk through the pastures at Meadowlark Farm. True to the farm's name, we were greeted with an Eastern Meadowlark singing from the closer field. A welcome sign of spring.

As we gathered and waited for everyone to arrive, Craig Zook pointed out a raptor perched on a distant tree. The bedraggled falcon was actively plucking feathers from its breakfast for the day. Through the scope, we could make out more of the features and all agreed it was a Merlin!

Eastern Bluebirds perched on fenceposts and small trees in the fields, hunting their own breakfast. Field, Chipping, Song and White-throated Sparrows sang from the fencerows and trees. We scanned the surrounding fields and fencerows hoping for a Vesper Sparrow, but it just wasn't meant to be. We did see Northern Flickers, an Eastern Phoebe and others. We made it to the sheep barn just as a brief rain shower passed. The little bottle lamb was a fun diversion from the weather.

Though we didn't have anything extraordinary to report from the morning, it was an enjoyable time spent with friends.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Greg Moyers reported seven **Greater White-fronted Geese** near Timberville on March 1.

The **Crested Caracara**, which was seen along Daphna Rd in Broadway from Feb. 14 – Feb. 20, resurfaced on private property just south of the original location on March 2. Many birders have been able to see the bird from Zion Mennonite Church, with the latest report coming from March 22.

Diane Lepkowski reported that a **White-throated Sparrow** banded on her property in November 2018 by Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus was back in her yard on March 2!

Chris Lehman reported four **Red-breasted Mergansers** at Lake Terrace on March 12. On the same date, Cory Taylor reported large numbers of **scaup, Red-breasted Mergansers**, and a **Common Goldeneye** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant.

A **Western Tanager** was reported and photographed on private property in the McGaheysville area on March 18.

Herb Myers reported his first-of-year **Brown Thrasher** plus **Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Red-breasted Nuthatch**, and **Golden-crowned Kinglet** along the Western Slope of Massanutten Mtn on a walk to Hensley's Pond on March 20.

Diane Lepkowski reported two dozen **scaup, Horned Grebe, Red-breasted Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Ruddy Ducks, Buffleheads**, and **Wood Ducks** at Lake Shenandoah on March 23.

Greg Moyers reported 47 **Ring-billed Gulls**, two **American Herring Gulls**, five **Bonaparte's Gulls**, **Double-Crested Cormorants**, and **Purple Martins** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on March 27.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Great Community Give coming soon – *Mike Donaldson, President*

This year, the Rockingham Bird Club will for the first time participate in the [Great Community Give](#), a one-day online event that promotes charitable giving to 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations located in and

serving Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. Early giving begins April 7, and the big day is **April 22**.

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.

3rd Annual Virginia Birding Classic – *Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources*

The Virginia Birding Classic is a statewide competition where teams search Virginia's public lands for as many bird species as possible in one consecutive 24-hour period.

The ultimate prize?

The Cardinal Cup: The team that identifies the most species during their official attempt is etched in history—and on the Cardinal Cup for time immemorial.

Assemble your team and prepare to scour the Commonwealth for every wren, rail, pipit, piper, hawk, heron, finch, falcon, loon, lark, owl, osprey, crow, and cardinal you can identify within 24 consecutive hours between **12:00 AM on April 15 and 11:59 PM on May 15, 2026**.

Strategy, skill, and endurance will decide who takes the Cup!

Registration is open March 13–May 14, 2026, and it is free to participate. For more information and registration details, visit <https://dwr.virginia.gov/virginia-birding-classic/>.



RBC presentation at JMU arboretum reminder

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.)

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 next meeting by ZOOM will be April 16, 2026. We will discuss the book *Raising Hare: a memoir* by Chloe Dalton. In May, our book selection is *The Living Mountain* by Nan Shepard. 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.





Singing Brown Thrasher – Happy Valley Rd near Keezletown, March 23, 2026

Photo credit: Herb Myers



RBC Spring Equinox Birders – Hillandale Park, March 20, 2026

Photo credit: Tom Mizell

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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