



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

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****** POTLUCK DINNER TIME: 6:00 PM ******

DATE: Thursday, June 11, 2026

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

Please join us for our end-of-the-season potluck dinner. Bring a dish to share, keeping in mind that the church is a peanut-free facility. Lemonade, tea and water will be provided along with compostable plates and utensils. Feel free to bring your own "setup."

The dinner will begin at **6:00 pm** followed by a slide show presented by Diane Lepkowski and Greg Moyers.

FIELD TRIPS – *Matt Gingerich*

Hillandale Bird Walk – Harrisonburg – Tuesday, June 9 and 23, July 14 and August 11

Please meet at 8:30 AM at Shelter number 12. Contact Kathy Byers at 540-308-9556 or email at fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com with questions or for more information.

Forest Breeding Bird Hike - Dunkle Hollow - Sunday, June 17, 6:00 am - ???

This field trip will be a more strenuous, 4+ mile hike on the forest road through Dunkle Hollow. This lovely forest road leads from Switzer Lake up through Dunkle Hollow and eventually to Flagpole Knob. We will plan to hike a portion of this road as it climbs through the forest and witness the clinal changes in habitats as we gain elevation. Hopefully we will witness the variety of breeding warblers, thrushes and vireos found there. Winter Wrens have nested in this area in the past and their song alone is worth the hike.

While this hike is not particularly steep or challenging, the distance and length of the trip will be longer than our typical outings. Now that we know people are willing to show up early for the before-work walks, I'm going to suggest a 6:00 start time, but that might change. To sign up or for questions, please email fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com Carpooling arrangements can be made.

Evening Common Nighthawk Watch - Meadowlark Farm, Linville - June 23 , 7:00 pm

Bring a lawn chair and come enjoy a summer's evening as we watch for Common Nighthawks as they forage and display above the field around Meadowlark Farm. Email fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com for information and directions.

TRIP REPORTS

Birding Before Work

May 6, 13 – *Matt Gingerich*

Our early morning walks continue to be a big hit! Despite a seemingly slow migration, we still had great turnouts and enjoyed good birds and good company on our morning walks.

The May 6 walk at Hillandale had close to 20 participants with several new faces. We were able to watch a pair of Great Crested Flycatchers investigating a cavity in a sycamore branch near the driveway. We eventually caught glimpses of several warblers high in the trees, including a male Cape May.

On May 13 we walked the Farm at Willow Run again. The thin, buzzy song of a Grasshopper Sparrow was difficult to hear, but we were treated to good views. A long-staying Yellow-breasted Chat announced its presence with its comical and peculiar sounds. He eventually presented itself with its bright yellow front, but only briefly. A male Scarlet Tanager sang from a hidden perch and people moved back and forth, up and down to catch a glimpse of this bird-on-fire. Unfortunately, there were not many warblers to be found, but it was an enjoyable morning nonetheless!

May 20 – *Andrew Troyer*

A group of nine birders met at Hillandale Park at 6:00 a.m. for our final Birding Before Work outing of the season. We began by finding Great Crested Flycatchers, likely the same pair we had observed a few weeks earlier. This time, however, they were joined by two Pileated Woodpeckers.

To explore some new territory, we made our way to the golf course, where we quickly added Indigo Bunting, Eastern Towhee, and Brown Thrasher to our list. Near Bluestone Elementary School, we spotted a pair of Eastern Meadowlarks foraging in the grass. On our way back, Alex Capaldi noticed what we believed to be an Orchard Oriole flying from a tree. A closer look revealed the beginnings of a grass-woven nest near the top of the tree, lending further support to the identification.

Thank you to everyone who joined these field trips throughout the season. I had a great time birding with you all.

Hillandale Bird Walk – *Tom Mizell*

On 12 May 2026, 20 members and friends of the Rockingham Bird Club enjoyed a beautiful blue sky Spring day in Hillandale Park. We were anxious to start our bird walk so our wish list this day was rather brief. Suggestions for our wish list included: any Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Blue Grosbeak and White-throated Sparrow.

Early arriving folks reported having seen Bay-breasted Warbler, Northern Parula, Red-eyed Vireo and Northern Cardinal. There was much feeding in the canopy overtop and behind Shelter 12. The overhead action drew us onto the path leading west from the shelter towards the unnamed concrete slab just across the stream channel. We saw Tufted Titmouse, Blue Jay, Least Flycatcher and Red-bellied Woodpecker. Blackburnian and Magnolia Warblers were among early highlights. See Mike Donaldson's photo of the striking Magnolia Warbler! Mourning Doves, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks flew overhead. We soon added American Redstart and Chestnut-sided Warbler, European

Starling and American Robin, White-breasted Nuthatch, Chimney Swift and Gray Catbird. Winding out the first hour we added Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, and Nashville Warblers, Turkey Vulture and Great Crested Flycatcher. Species total was 25 in the first hour.

We moved North from the slab, and an Indigo Bunting was seen near the Northwest Corner as we arrived there at 9:30. It was a pleasant 52 degrees. We added Eastern Wood-Pewee, Cedar Waxwings, and Northern Flicker. Common Yellowthroat and Mourning Warbler gave us pause in the Northwest Corner as well. Brown-headed Cowbird and American Goldfinch finished up our journey in the corner.

Matt Gingerich suggested we head towards “Thrush Woods”. That sounded inviting and we headed there with little to no hesitation! We arrived near Shelter 10 at a bird/squirrel feeding station and by 9:50 we added Yellow-billed Cuckoo. We were in Thrush Woods now and soon we saw a Swainson's Thrush. The thrush gave us all very good looks at about 10:15 AM.

We made a small loop in “Thrush Woods” and as we got back to the feeding area, we added Scarlet Tanager, Carolina Chickadee, Cooper’s Hawk, Eastern Towhee, Downy Woodpecker, Baltimore Oriole and Carolina Wren.

Greg Moyers, who had left earlier, called to report having seen a Palm Warbler just west of the old log cabin site. So, the remaining birders headed in that direction. We added Common Grackle, Chipping Sparrow and Field Sparrow. Black Vultures made cameo flyovers this day. The last bird I have in my notes was a Raven! We wrapped up around noon, and the temperature was 63 degrees. Total species for the day was 48.

We were happy to have at least three people that had not been on a Hillandale Walk before. Please check out the Summer Schedule. Hope you can join us! Bring a friend!

School is out! If you'd like to get a little extra credit, go back and search through the report. See if you can find twelve warblers, 3 woodpeckers, 4 Compass Direction birds (for lack of a better title), and 20 birds whose name includes a color. Have fun!

Pasture Walk at Edom Springs Farm – Linville

On a cool and misty morning, seventeen participants gathered at Edom Springs Farm near Linville. Owners Peter Dula and Ilse Ackerman have invested significant time and energy to help heal and restore a farm that had been abused and over-grazed. Where there once was sparse pasture, bare soil and eroded gullies, now the hills and valleys are covered in a blanket of green grasses and scattered tree plantings.

The working part of the farm is managed by Lee Good who practices sustainable grazing methods with his herd of beef cattle. Coupled with the conservation practices of tree plantings, riparian buffers and wildflower meadow, the land hosts a variety of grassland bird species throughout the year.

On this morning, our group enjoyed a long walk around the perimeter of the property. Throughout the fields we heard the songs of Eastern Meadowlark, Grasshopper Sparrows, Bobolinks, a Savannah Sparrow, Eastern Kingbirds, and Red-winged Blackbirds. All of these species depend on healthy grassland for nesting. Fortunately for them, the cattle have been taken off the fields during the nesting season - April 15 - July 1. This program is designed to allow these species to be left undisturbed for their brief nesting season. And the program is helping! Multiple times we witnessed Meadowlarks carrying food in their beaks as a meal for nearby nestlings. Red-winged Blackbirds scolded and

hovered above us if we ventured too close to a hidden nest. Tree Swallow nestlings peeked out of a nest box.

It is a treasure to find people who are capable and willing to help protect our natural world, prioritizing conservation and preservation. Our group was grateful for the opportunity to experience this beautiful place and see the work that is being done to help our avian friends.

Once in a Blue Moon - Owls and Nightjars - Union Springs

You don't come across a Chuck-will's-widow in Rockingham County very often. Perhaps once in a Blue Moon?! Thanks to some helpful tips from Kevin Shank, and the generosity of his neighbors, our group was treated to an exciting evening with some nocturnal birds. The mixed pine and deciduous forest along the lower edge of the western mountains is about the only reliable place to find Chuck-will's-widow in the county. The Shanks have had these birds on their property for over 30 years, but this year they have been frequenting the neighboring forest.

Our group arrived at dusk and were greeted with a sentinel Bald Eagle perched atop a snag along the driveway. We parked and walked the gravel driveway as we listened to the forest songbirds wind down for the night and the night sounds awaken. A towhee, thrasher, and Great Crested Flycatcher called, but the pewees called the longest. Before they quieted down for the night, they were joined by the shriek of a juvenile Great Horned Owl! It called from above the forest road ahead of us, but we only caught glimpses of it as it moved ahead of us, always landing just out of view.

Then the Chuck-will's-widow started to call! First, it was faint and in the distance or behind the hill (we couldn't tell for sure). The sound of their call carries around those hills and hollers and you're never quite sure exactly where the sound is coming from. We walked back up the hill and there the song was louder. We could hear the "chuck" at the beginning of the song. Eventually he moved further away and then stopped calling.

As we walked back to the vehicles, someone suggested we give one more try for a screech-owl. (I had been whistling before with no response.) Soon a pale shadow quickly darted over our heads and then from the nearby trees we heard the tremulous call of an Eastern Screech-Owl. There were at least two of them! We eventually found one in our flashlight beam and caught short glimpses of them as they moved about the forest edge. What a treat!

Nocturnal birding isn't for everyone, and it's often more enjoyable with others. I was grateful for the folks who came along and appreciated the night as much as I did. And the Blue Moon rising behind a thin veil of clouds was spectacular!

BIRD SIGHTINGS

It has been quite a month for great birds in the area! Many rarities were brought in by the prolonged rains around Memorial Day weekend. Read on for the details!

Tom Mizell reported a **Great Egret** at Wildwood Park on April 21 and a **Baltimore Oriole** at the same location on April 23.

Greg Moyers reported a **Least Flycatcher** at Hillandale Park on May 2.

On the weekend of May 2-3, Evelyn Shank's nephew watched two birds at Briery Branch Gap that were a bit larger and more pink than the **Red Crossbills**, had wing-bars, and bills that were not crossed. He suspected they may have been **Pine Grosbeaks**.

Matt Gingerich found several good birds at the VMRC Willow Run Farm on May 5, including **Yellow-breasted Chat**, **Lincoln's Sparrow**, **Least Flycatcher**, **Blue Grosbeak**, and **Wilson's, Nashville**, and **Cape May Warblers**.

Karen Seward reported a **Dunlin** at Leonard's Pond on May 5.

Matt Gingerich found a **Vesper Sparrow** singing as if on territory on Antioch Rd during the first week of May. The bird has continued to be reported throughout the month.

Diane Lepkowski had a **Yellow-throated Vireo** at her home east of Harrisonburg on May 8.

Tim Showalter Ehst had a **Mourning Warbler** at his place west of Harrisonburg on May 8.

Karen Seward had several good finds at FR 539, Hone Quarry Ridge Trail, on May 8, including **Mourning Warbler**, **Canada Warbler**, **Ruffed Grouse**, and **Black-billed Cuckoo**. At least two **Mourning Warblers** have been consistently reported along this trail throughout May.

Greg Moyers reported numerous good birds at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at JMU on May 9-10, including **Wilson's**, **Magnolia**, **Blackburnian**, **Bay-breasted**, and **Nashville Warblers**, **Veery**, and **Lincoln's Sparrow**. Greg also reported **Cape May**, **Tennessee**, and **Canada Warblers**, **White-eyed Vireo**, and **Gray-cheeked Thrush** at Paul State Forest on May 9 and a singing **Northern Water-thrush**, a pair of **Blue Grosbeaks**, and **Solitary Sandpiper** at the Northend Greenway on May 10.

Alex Capaldi reported **Wilson's**, **Cape May**, **Nashville**, and **Magnolia Warblers**, plus a likely **Bay-breasted Warbler** at the Willow Run Farm on May 11.

William Leigh found numerous shorebirds on May 11, including 38 **Least Sandpipers**, a **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, **Semipalmated Plover**, 10 **Solitary Sandpipers**, and three **Lesser Yellowlegs** at a pond on Ottobine Rd and 16 **Short-billed Dowitchers** at the pond on George Wine Rd. Huck Hutchens reported a calling **Northern Bobwhite** along George Wine Rd later that day.

James Shank reported a **Lincoln's Sparrow** at the Shank's place on Kiser Rd on May 12.

Tim Showalter Ehst found a **Mourning Warbler** at Paul State Forest on May 12. At around the same time on the same date, a **Mourning Warbler** was found singing at Hillandale Park on the monthly RBC walk.

Derek Yoder got pictures of a **Glossy Ibis** on a farm pond on Lacey Spring Rd on May 13.

Ken Ranck found six **Semipalmated Plovers** at Leonard's Pond on May 13.

Ben Spory reported a **Willow Flycatcher** and **Least** and **Semipalmated Sandpipers** at the pond on Fort Lynne Rd on May 14.

Tim Showalter Ehst reported 10 **Short-billed Dowitchers** and a **Dunlin** at the Nazarene Church Rd Wetland on May 14.

Matt Gingerich had a calling **Alder Flycatcher** at his place near Linville on May 15.

Tim Showalter Ehst found a **Red-necked Phalarope** on the Cooks Creek Rd farm pond on May 16. The bird was sighted in this area for the next three days.

Mike Smith had a **Common Nighthawk** at his place near Elkton on May 16.

Karen Seward reported **Cerulean, Tennessee, and Canada Warblers** and a singing **Winter Wren** in the Switzer/Dunkle Hollow area on May 17.

Greg Moyers reported a singing **Mourning Warbler** at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum on May 17. On the same date, Greg reported **Tennessee, Blackpoll, Magnolia, Blackburnian, and Black-throated Blue Warblers**, a late **Purple Finch**, and photographed a **Black-billed Cuckoo** at Paul State Forest.

Diane Lepkowski reported a **Blue Grosbeak** singing at Leonard's Pond on May 17. The following day, Diane reported a **Gray-cheeked Thrush, Northern Waterthrush, and Tennessee and Blackpoll Warblers** at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum.

Tim Showalter Ehst and Alex Capaldi each reported a singing **Northern Waterthrush** on Slab Rd on May 19.

Tim Showalter Ehst and Nate Clark found two **Soras** at the Weavers Rd pond on May 21. Sora reports continue to come in from this pond.

Herb Myers watched an all-white mystery bird on Happy Valley Rd on May 21.

Cory Taylor reported a **Dunlin** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on May 21. The following day, Matt Gingerich reported eight **Dunlins** and all local swallow species, including **Bank and Cliff**, at the same location. Later, on the 22nd, Chris Lehman reported two **Black Terns** there. On May 23, Chris reported a **Hudsonian Whimbrel** flying over the wastewater plant.

Karen Seward reported six **Dunlins**, at least 19 **Semipalmated Plovers**, and at least 35 "peep" sandpipers at Turner Sod Farm on May 22.

Mike Donaldson had a male **Painted Bunting** at his Harrisonburg residence on May 23. Mike and Linda were gracious enough to host numerous visitors to see the bird over the course of the day. This marks the second time the Donaldsons have had a **Painted Bunting** visit their feeders over the last several years.

Matt Gingerich got reports of a **Sandhill Crane** on Cromer Rd and was able to photograph the crane flying off over Linville Creek on May 23.

Greg Moyers reported an **Alder Flycatcher** calling at the Willow Run VMRC Farm on May 25.

Matt Gingerich found a **Dunlin** and other shorebirds on Skidmore Rd on May 25.

Mike Smith reported an **Osprey** at the Rt. 33 bridge at Elkton on May 27.

Matt found two **Dickcissels** on Wampler Rd near Timberville on May 23. Matt also found at least one **Dickcissel** on Moores Mill Rd, south of New Market, on May 29.

Cory Williams reported **Dickcissel, Bobolink, and Blue Grosbeak** along Beacon Hill Rd on May 27.

There were several notable sightings just across the border in Augusta Co. in the area within, or very close to, the RBC Christmas Bird Count Circle, in late May. William Leigh and Alex Capaldi reported two **Wilson's Phalaropes** on a pond on Timber Ridge Rd on May 18. Later the same day,

Greg Moyers photographed a **Great White Heron** on Narrow Back Rd. On May 23, Vic Laubach reported a flock of 36 **Hudsonian Whimbrels** flying over Timber Ridge Rd. On May 23, Vic reported five **Hudsonian Whimbrels** in a field on Timber Ridge Rd. Karen Seward found a **Glossy Ibis** and calling **Northern Bobwhite** on Emmanuel Church Rd on May 25. Mike Donaldson reported two **Black-bellied Plovers** on Emmanuel Church Rd on the same date.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RBC Elections – *Art Fovargue, Nominating Committee Chair*

I am delighted to announce that the following officers were elected unanimously for the upcoming 2026–2027 RBC year at the May membership meeting:

President – Mike Donaldson

First Vice President, Programs – Kathy Byers

Second Vice President, Field Trips – Matt Gingerich

Secretary – Allie Sawyer

Treasurer – Audrey Shenk

Member-at-large – Miranda Troyer

Congratulations. Please join me in thanking them for their willingness to serve, and for their devotion to the Club for the next year, in addition to past efforts.

Looking forward, if anyone is at all interested in serving as one of these officers in the future, now is the time to talk with member(s) of the Executive Committee to gather information on what is involved, etc. Not that I'm campaigning for any of our officers to be replaced, it's just that the Club's vitality is always enhanced with new ideas, energy and faces.

Bird Club Book Club (BCBC)

The bird club book club (BCBC) will meet by ZOOM at 6:00 PM on Thursday, June 25 to discuss *The Backyard Bird Chronicles* by Amy Tan. In July, our book selection is *Wesley the Owl: the Remarkable Story of an Owl and His Girl* by Stacey O'Brien. In August, we will discuss *Flight Paths: How a Passionate and Quirky Group of Pioneer Scientists Solved the Mystery of Bird Migration* by Rebecca Heisman. 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.



Enjoy your summer
See you in September



Eastern Wood-Pewee – George Washington National Forest, May 19, 2026

Photo credit: Elizabeth Miller



Great White Heron – Narrow Back Rd, Augusta County, May 18, 2026

Photo credit: Greg Moyers



Magnolia Warbler – Hillendale Park, May 12, 2026

Photo credit: Mike Donaldson



Painted Bunting – Donaldson residence,
Harrisonburg, May 23, 2026



Photo credit: Mike Donaldson

Painted Bunting – Smoker residence,
Harrisonburg, May 24, 2026



Photo credit: LaVon Smoker



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

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