



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume LI

Number 9

May 2026

DATE: Thursday, May 14, 2026

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: *Behavior and Ecology of Northern Cardinals* presented by Joanna Vondrasek

Joanna Vondrasek, professor of biology at Piedmont Virginia Community College, will focus on the singing and mating behavior of cardinals as well as their winter behavior and ecology.

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

FIELD TRIPS – Matt Gingerich

Hawkins' Property - Bergton VA - Monday, May 11 - 8:00 am-12:00 pm

Henry Hawkins has offered to host the RBC at their family's property near Bergton. This extensive property includes montane forest, a stretch of Crab Run, low meadows and a pond. Participants can choose to hike the gravel driveway through the forest and up the mountain in search of warblers and other breeding birds or walk through the grassy lower areas along the stream and field edges in search of migrants and other birds of the open habitat. Participants may also bring lawn chairs to relax while watching for hawks, eagles and birds nesting around the house and barn. There is no set itinerary for the morning, and participants will be free to choose their level of activity. Participants are responsible for packing their own lunch. Restrooms are available and cellular service is not reliable (depending on carrier).

Please RSVP to fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com to sign up for this trip. Because of the distance to the property and the remote location, we will plan to carpool as much as possible. Some high clearance SUV's would be helpful to provide transport across Crab Run to access the property. Please let Matt Gingerich know if you are able to help with this. We will plan to have a carpool location from Harrisonburg and possibly Broadway. *The property is about an hour from Harrisonburg, so we will plan to meet at 7:00 am for carpooling.*

Hillendale Bird Walk – Harrisonburg – Tuesday, May 12 – 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. Contact Kathy Byers at 540-308-9556 or email at fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com with questions or for more information.

Birding Before Work - Wednesday Mornings – 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 early May. These outings will be informal walks through birding “hotspots” in and near Harrisonburg (Hillandale Park, JMU Arboretum, VMRC Farm). Each Monday, we will send out an email with the location for that week. So far, we have had great turnouts for these walks. Peak migration is still yet to come, so plan to join us for these May outings. We may add another walk on May 20 if it looks promising. For more information and questions, contact fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com Bring your own coffee and binoculars!

Pasture Walk at Edom Springs Farm – Linville - Friday, May 22 - 8:00 am

Join us for a walk through the pastures of this picturesque farm along the banks of Linville Creek. Edom Springs is host to a variety of grassland and farmland species (including nesting Dickcissels last year!). Come and see what they are doing to help and protect native grassland birds on their property. This field trip will include a long walk through uneven pastureland on mowed paths. Please plan accordingly.

Please RSVP to fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com to sign up or for more information.

Once in a Blue Moon - Owls and Nightjars - Union Springs - Sunday evening, May 31

Come search for night birds under a Blue Moon! We will visit several locations around Union Springs listening for Eastern Whip-poor-wills, Chuck-wills-widow, Barred Owls and more! This is primarily an auditory experience, so bring your calm and patient attention. More specific details to be added closer to the date. Please RSVP to fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com

TRIP REPORTS

Birding Before Work

April 22 - The Farm at Willow Run - VMRC - Matt Gingerich

I wasn't sure how many people would show up to this type of field trip, but I was pleasantly surprised when vehicle after vehicle pulled up to park outside of the Farm. We had around 25 participants who were up bright and early! Now that I know that people are willing to get out early, I may start scheduling our other field trips earlier.

We enjoyed listening to the early-morning songs of some of the local breeding birds. The American Robins wake up extra early with the streetlights of town. However, not many migrants were found during the walk. We did enjoy several Red-shouldered Hawks, flocks of Cedar Waxwings zipping overhead, energetic Ruby-crowned Kinglets and the buzzy song of Grasshopper Sparrows. This place is definitely worth checking out as migration continues to build!

April 29 - Edith J. Carrier Arboretum - JMU - Andrew Troyer

Over 20 birders met at the JMU Arboretum at 6:30 a.m. on Wednesday, April 29. The second “Birding Before Work” trip was again well attended by a surprisingly chipper group of early birds. Over the past week, migration had seemed to pick up. Around dawn, identification by ear was easiest thanks to enthusiastic singers, beginning with the melodic song of a Wood Thrush. Some of the more notable

birds included Eastern Towhee, Ovenbird, Red-eyed Vireo, and Pileated Woodpecker. Dave Wendelken also later pointed out the call of a Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

We didn't need to travel far before finding considerable activity in the tops of some Sycamore trees, where we spent most of the morning. Mike Smith was quick to hear the song of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, which was later spotted in the treetops. Two Baltimore Orioles later landed nearby and stayed long enough for most of the group to get good looks. Mike Donaldson identified the song of a Northern Parula. By that point in the morning, many folks headed back to the pond, where they saw a Mallard before continuing on with their day.

We hope to continue this momentum in the coming weeks with both bird sightings and participation. It's been exciting to see so many people—young and old, in school, in their careers, or in retirement – all with the energy to wake up early and go birding.

Hillandale Bird Walk – Tom Mizell

On Tuesday, April 14, fourteen members of the Rockingham Bird Club gathered at Hillandale Park. I think we had the longest wish list ever including Blue-headed Vireo, Brown Thrasher, Kirkland's Warbler, Eastern Kingbird, Gray Catbird, Mississippi Kite, Palm Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, any Vireo and Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

A recreational biking program was setting up in our usual gathering place at Shelter 12, and we were asked to park elsewhere. Traffic cones began to appear as we adjusted. Our safety minute was a caution for us to be alert to both the soon to be arriving bikers and cones that were springing up under our feet. As the walk got underway, we proceeded north of Shelter number 12. Within the first minutes a nest was seen in the cedars and a Robin fluttering nervously nearby had nesting material in its beak. By the time we got to the northwest corner of the park we added Northern Cardinal, Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Bluejay, Eastern Towhee and American Goldfinch. We reached the northwest corner at 9 AM. We saw our first wish list bird in that cedar tree that is perforated by Sapsucker holes. Ruby-crowned Kinglets provided much singing and flitted about energetically. Even in its hasty feeding movements they lingered in the cedar long enough for most to see it. Did anyone see it's crown? We also had a Yellow-rumped Warbler in this stretch. It was our only warbler of the day.

As we headed south along the golf course boundary a flock of Cedar Waxwings flew overhead. Then, I heard a few moans as some expressed disdain as a Brown-headed Cowbird appeared. Our dismay was soon superseded by the Pileated Woodpecker which all the birders seemed to enjoy. At the "unnamed" concrete slab several White-throated Sparrows hopped about the gravel. Turkey Vultures glided overhead and Mourning Doves cooed.

Near that concrete slab much of the group was distracted by a beautiful butterfly. A Juniper Hairstreak settled calmly in the grass next to the trail and gave us quite a show. Hairstreaks have an interesting way of rubbing their hind wings together and this one entertained us for several minutes. Thanks to William Lee for the photo!

As we approached the fork in the trail near the old log cabin site, we had Fish Crow, Purple Finch, Field Sparrow and Carolina Chickadee. We reached the bike trail at 10 AM. A Red-tailed Hawk sailed overhead. It was sunny and a pleasant 73°.

There were 10 birders left. I had to leave early and added White-breasted Nuthatch as I got into my

car at Shelter 10 Parking Lot. The remaining birders proceeded west along the bike trail and added Chipping Sparrow, Black Vulture, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Harrier, Broad-winged Hawk, Hairy Woodpecker and Northern Flicker. Other birds for the morning included Tree Swallow, European Starling, Northern Mockingbird, White-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark and Common Grackle.

A total of 37 species were enjoyed by noon. Hope you can join us on May 12!

PS

On Monday 27 April, two weeks later, as some club members learned about the Packs and Tracks equipment as Paige French demonstrated two of the units, we enjoyed more migrants that included Northern Parula, Black-and-white Warbler, Palm Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Great Crested Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Cuckoo preening in a treetop, Eastern Kingbirds and Chimney Swift. Also repeats from 14 April included Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker and Northern Cardinal and strikingly colorful Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Wildwood Park Walk – Bridgewater – Alex Capaldi

About twenty club members gathered at the Wildwood Park pavilion on a fine April morning for what turned out to be a very pleasant early spring outing. Nestled along the North River, the park's mix of open woodland and riparian habitat provided a satisfying morning of birding.

We had a rapturous moment when a juvenile Bald Eagle made a dramatic flyover, followed shortly by an immature Red-tailed Hawk, and then the morning's undisputed star, an Osprey, perched obligingly across the river, giving the entire group extended, excellent views.

One of the most delightful surprises of the trip was a large flock of about 17 migrating Blue Jays flew together overhead to provide a striking sight. Meanwhile, a few of their more settled neighbors were already attending to domestic matters, spotted carrying nesting material. Chelsa Shank caught a brief glimpse of what was likely a Spotted Sandpiper working the riverbank, a promising harbinger of the shorebird migration to come.

In the woodpecker department, we did quite well: Red-bellied, Downy, Hairy, and Pileated were all recorded by most of the group with Northern Flicker being picked up by a few members to round out a fine five-woodpecker day. A Ruby-crowned Kinglet made a welcome appearance, and a group of White-throated Sparrows provided some comic relief, busily munching on dandelions.

In just under two hours and less than half a mile of walking, the group tallied about 25 species. While we were too early for nesting Baltimore Orioles by a week, all told, it was a lovely morning along the river with good birds and good company!

Woodland Wildflower and Warbler Walk - Hone Quarry – Matt Gingerich

Clair Mellinger and Matt Gingerich facilitated a leisurely walk down the forest road of Hone Quarry in search of Wildflower and Warblers. When planning such field trips in advance, it's hard to know if the birds and the weather will cooperate. The extreme warm weather in early April really pushed the early wildflowers past their peak and we missed some of the early spring ephemeral flowers. While breeding warblers were on territory, many of the passage migrants had not yet arrived. But we did find some nice flowering plants and some beautiful warblers!

Floral highlights included the delicate yellow Bellwort, the hidden flowers of the Wild Ginger, the diminutive One-flowered Cancer-root, and an educational demonstration of why the Bloodroot has its name.

On the avian side, we enjoyed the melodic song of the Wood Thrush and the low drumming of a Ruffed Grouse right from the parking area. As we walked, we also found Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, a female Scarlet Tanager and ten species of warblers, including Louisiana Waterthrush, Ovenbird, Black-and-white, Northern Parula, and Black-throated Green. The highlight for many was several pairs of Blackburnian Warblers that were seen in the treetops of a forest clearing. One female was observed just above our heads gathering silk nesting material from a Tent Caterpillar nest. The female would return repeatedly to the silk nest, pull strands of silk with her beak and then eventually fly to a tall pine tree in the distance where she surely has her nest well hidden. What a treat to watch! (photo credit: Mike Donaldson, April 24)



Spring Migration Walk - Starry Meadows – Linville, VA — Mike Donaldson

Fourteen intrepid souls, including our gracious hosts Jay and Sharon Landis, enjoyed a lovely walk, sampling the varied habitats and lovely scenery of Starry Meadows. Despite the unseasonably chilly morning, the group logged roughly 40 species.

True to form, the signature species of the property, the Red-headed Woodpecker, did not disappoint. We saw at least seven of these high-contrast beauties, which prompted eBird to demand an explanation for a high count for that species.

Other highlights included two Red-tailed Hawks hanging around near a presumably active nest, an adult Bald Eagle soaring overhead, Eastern Meadowlarks in the field near the main road, a Belted Kingfisher along the creek, excellent looks at a Brown Thrasher and an Eastern Towhee pair, and two Eastern Kingbirds spotted by Elizabeth Miller and Deb Turner on the fence near the barn.

We had been hearing Baltimore Orioles singing, but we finally got some looks, including of one that came out on some bare branches on a treetop to much appreciation from the group when we made our way up the hill from the creek. Two Orchard Orioles, a female and a male, were also spotted.

At the top of the hill, Jay Landis gave us the choice of continuing or heading back to the starting point. Those who opted to return to the start were rewarded with an Indigo Bunting near the Landis home. Jay generously led those who remained on a loop behind the house, wrapping up a highly enjoyable outing.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Mike Smith reported four **Red Crossbills** near the VA/WV state line on Rt. 33 on March 29.

Greg Moyers reported a **Common Loon** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on April 5.

Matt Gingerich had a **Vesper Sparrow** at his place near Linville on April 6.

Kathy Byers reported that the **Crested Caracara** was seen at the usual spot near Zion Mennonite Church near Broadway on April 7.

Ken Ranck found two **Bonaparte's Gulls** at Leonard's Pond on April 8.

Greg Moyers reported a **Northern Waterthrush** at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at JMU on April 16. This species has been a reliable visitor to the arboretum for a month or so each Spring for many years.

Diane Holsinger had a two-scooter day on April 19. She reported four **Surf Scoters** on private property and later found a **White-winged Scoter** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Mike Smith welcomed his first **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** of the year at his place near Elkton on April 20. On April 23, Mike reported several **Eastern Whip-Poor-Wills** and an **Eastern Screech-Owl** calling at Beldor Hollow east of Elkton.

Cory Taylor reported a **White-rumped Sandpiper** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on April 23.

Allen Larner reported an **American Golden-Plover** at Leonard's Pond on April 24. Allen and other birders were able to positively ID the bird after much study. This species is commonly reported in the county each Fall but is very uncommon in Spring.

James Shank reported two male **Bobolinks** in fields off Kiser Rd on May 2.

William Leigh reported a **Semipalmated Plover** and other shorebirds at a pond on Ottobine Rd on May 2.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Great Community Give gratitude and roundup – Mike Donaldson, President

On April 22, the Rockingham Bird Club for the first time participated 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.

The Club received a total of \$1,276 from 27 donors.



Many thanks to all who donated to the RBC and other local nonprofits, and copious kudos and gratitude to The Community Foundation of Harrisonburg and Rockingham for running such an important and successful initiative.

Summer Birding Opportunity for High School Students

[Earlham College](#) in Richmond, Indiana, is reaching out to bird clubs to inform them about summer sessions for young birders attending high school. The deadline for applying is June 1

Opportunities Await!

A few members of the Executive Committee recently met Paige French at Hillandale Park to get acquainted with track chairs. [Blue Ridge Packs and Tracks](#) is offering a wonderful opportunity for anyone that would love the chance to bird the trails at the park but are not physically able.



The chairs and trained volunteers would be provided for no charge, and a day and time would be set up to accommodate participants.

We found the chairs easy to use, quiet and well suited for the trails at Hillandale. The chairs can be driven by the participant or an attendant or a combination of both.

For more information, please contact Kathy Byers @ 540-308-9556 or kkbyers77@gmail.com

RBC Elections – *Art Fovargue, Nominating Committee Chair*

Our election of officers is upon us. No redistricting, no primaries, but straight to the final voting at the May membership meeting. As per our Constitution and By-Laws, the Nominating Committee has prepared the following slate of officers for the election:

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

Those elected will assume office in July.

For anyone else interested in running for one of these offices, nominations will be accepted from the floor prior to the casting of votes, with consent of the nominee. If someone is interested in this nomination process, please send me a message via the [RBC Contact page](#).

Bird Club Book Club (BCBC)

The bird club book club (BCBC) will meet by ZOOM at 6:00 PM on Thursday, May 21 to discuss the book *The Living Mountain* by Nan Shepherd. The next meeting by ZOOM will be in June when we discuss Amy Tan's *The Backyard Bird Chronicles*. 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.



Northern House Wren – Hillandale Park – April 20

Photo credit: Mike Donaldson



Juniper Hairstreak – Hillandale Park, Harrisonburg, April 14, 2026

Photo credit: William Leigh



Nesting Eastern Bluebirds – Bridgewater, April 26, 2026

Photo credit: Jake Hoodock





Getting acquainted with track chairs at Hillandale Park
courtesy of Paige French and [Blue Ridge Packs and Tracks](#)



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

EMAIL: info@rockinghambirdclub.com

ON THE WEB: <https://rockinghambirdclub.com>