



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume LII

Number 1

Sept 2026

DATE: Thursday, September 10, 2026

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: *Fall Feeding on the James River* presented by Bill Draper of Richmond VA.

Join us for fabulous looks at Ospreys, Bald Eagles, herons and egrets taking advantage of the fall fish runs on the James River.

Mr. Draper is a long-time outdoorsman and serves on the Board of Directors of Friends of the James River Park. His unique photo exploration of the James River has been embraced by the Richmond community including local and state media, who often feature his photographs.

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

FIELD TRIPS – Matt Gingerich

Hillandale Monthly Bird Walk – Harrisonburg – Tuesday, September 8

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.

Hillandale First Birds of Fall Walk – Harrisonburg – Wednesday, September 23

Please meet at 8:30 AM at Shelter number 12. Contact Tom Mizell at fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com with questions or for more information.

Early Birding field trips, Friday mornings

Join us for a season of early birding this fall! This is a nice opportunity to bird around Harrisonburg for early risers. We will have 5 outings following the schedule below:

September 11, 6:30 am at the JMU Arboretum

September 18, 6:30 am at the VMRC farm

September 25, 6:30 am at the JMU Arboretum

October 2, 7 am at Hillandale Park

October 9, 7 am at the VMRC farm

Fall Migrant Forest Road Hike - Long Run Rd and Second Mountain Trail - Saturday, Sept 12, 7:00 am.

September is the peak of the fall migration season. Join us as we walk the forest road along the ridge

of Second Mountain in search of warblers, vireos, thrushes and more! This road is mostly level and fairly wide, which should provide good viewing for the group. At the far end of the hike is a power-line cut with an overlook to the north which may provide some hawk-watching potential. Target species include Philadelphia Vireo, Connecticut Warbler, Olive-sided Flycatcher and more!

We plan to walk a 2-mile stretch (out-and-back total of 4 miles) of forest road that is mostly level and follows the ridge. Carpooling from Harrisonburg or from the base of Long Run Rd is possible. To sign up or for questions, please email fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com

Scenic Hawkwatch from Blackrock Summit in Shenandoah National Park - Friday, Sept 18 - 7:00 am-2:00 pm

Tucked in the Southeastern-most corner of Rockingham County is the beautiful Blackrock Summit boulder field in Shenandoah National Park. With views that span from South to Northeast, this is a scenic perch for watching migrant songbirds and hawks. As we know, many hawks pass through Rockfish Gap to the south, so this site has the potential for some decent numbers of hawks within our county borders. Mid-September is the peak of Broad-winged Hawk migration and hopefully we will see some kettles! Songbird Migration can also be excellent from this location. Participants wishing to make the most of this trip could arrive early at dawn and potentially witness warblers, thrushes and tanagers zipping by at eye level!

To reach Blackrock Summit, participants will be required to hike a short ½ mile trail from the parking area. The other challenge of this location is navigating the boulder field. There is a level trail that circumnavigates the outcropping, but more adventurous folks can climb the boulders for a higher vantage.

As always, migration prediction is difficult and the date and time of this field trip may be subject to change based on weather and migration forecasts.

Please contact fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com to sign up and to receive updated information. Carpooling from Harrisonburg can be arranged. A National Park pass is required for each vehicle.

Chimney Swift Roost Watch - Singers Glen Community Center - Tuesday evening, September 29, 7:00 pm

Bring a lawn chair and come watch a swirling vortex of swifts as they gather for the night to roost in the chimney of the old Singers Glen school building. Chimney Swifts are a species of concern as their population is declining due to loss of nesting sites. This large chimney is an important roosting location as these birds gather before they migrate south. Email fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com for information and directions.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillendale Bird Walk – Kathy Byers

On June 9, 2026, Kathy Byers and Randy Cline did their best to stand-in for Tom Mizell as he spent some time with family. It was decided to change our usual route so that we could attempt to find the Yellow-breasted Chat that had appeared up on the Friendly City Trail. As we walked up the path we quickly added the “usual suspects” to our list: American Robin and Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal, Fish Crow and Blue Jay. We were all a bit surprised with a classic fall sight of thirty Canada Geese flying in V-formation.

The further we moved up the trail, the more anxious we became to find the Chat. As we approached the area, Northern Mockingbirds kept teasing us with a variety of bird songs. An Orchard Oriole had us spending a good bit of time trying to get eyes on it.

Then we heard the Chat calling further up the trail. We quickly found ourselves quite close to the bird and its crazy song but could not actually locate it. As we spread out up and down the path, a call went up, "I got him!" Chery Carlile, our friend from Utah, spotted the bird singing away at the top of a cedar. Just about everyone got good looks at it. It eventually moved around the area and we followed, trying to get the best looks and pictures possible. The group was happy to have had the experience of seeing and hearing such an interesting bird. Our final lists included hawks, swallows and a Blue Grosbeak and totaled 36.

Hillandale Bird Walk, June 23, July 14 and August 11, 2026 – Tom Mizell and Kathy Byers

23 June 2026: It rained an inch yesterday and last night. It was raining as I drove into the park where I found the ever dependable Randy Cline awaiting in his car. He was talking to our friend Bill Call, Bill and Randy frequently walk the park together. Bill often informs the group what birds to expect along the trails as he and his dog Calvin are generally in the park before our club walks get underway. Anyhow, it was rainy! No other club members arrived and by 8:45 AM Randy, Bill and a wet Calvin departed. I hung around for another 15 minutes or so in case of late arrivals. I left around 9:00 after conducting a thorough count. My species count for the morning was Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, American Robin and Red-bellied Woodpecker.

14 July 2026: On a sunny, blue sky day 10 members of the club set their wish list at Cuckoo, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Bluebird and Carolina Chickadee. The first bird observed was Blue Jay. Not unusual as the Blue Jays seem to pride themselves in either being first seen or heard in the early moments. They are often joined by Northern Cardinals, Mourning Dove and American Robins and today that pattern was true to form. White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Great Crested Flycatcher soon joined the sightings.

Yanni spotted a Northern Flicker and Linda Halpern pointed to the Chimney Swifts racing overhead. By the time we reached the Northwest Corner Pedestrian Bridge Purple Martins and Common Grackles took our numbers to 12 species. Zac Perdue added American Goldfinches as they bobbed along in flight. We moved along fairly quickly this morning and were near the slab by 9:09 AM. Here Kathy Byers found an Indigo Bunting our first wish list bird of the day! An Eastern Towhee called and we added a Field Sparrow. About this same time Rick Halpern made a brief cameo appearance as his morning walk intersected our group bird walk. We were glad to see him and after a brief morning greeting he continued his sojourn.

By 9:30 we reached the Bike trail. A Red-tailed Hawk soared and a second wish list bird appeared, the Eastern Bluebird. As we were walking past the open field that lies to the south of the trail and in a distant (¼ mile?) cedar tree we challenged ourselves to focus on and identify three different birds. The distant birds were Northern Mockingbird, Indigo Bunting and Eastern Meadowlark as the three adorned the tree together. It's always a treat to see a Meadowlark in the bright sunlight. Turkey Vulture, House Finch, Brown Thrasher, Carolina Wren and Carolina Chickadee, (our third wish list bird) rounded out our list of 23 species for the day. We will find our fourth wish list bird, a cuckoo, another day!

11 August 2026: Despite a sketchy forecast, a nice group of eleven folks attended the walk. We were super pleased to welcome three birders new to the area and look forward to seeing them more!

The birds seemed to be a bit hunkered down on this overcast, dreary morning, but the group made the best of it by catching up on everyone's summer travels and getting acquainted with our first-timers. A pair of Eastern Wood-Peepees gave us some nice views, sharing their tree with a Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse. As we checked out the area west of the bridge, the weather became a concern, so the group headed back to the parking lot. A total of 18 species were seen or heard by the group on this rather short trip. We look forward to the beginning of migration and our fall walks!

BIRD SIGHTINGS

It has been a summer of kites in Rockingham County, as well as some out-of-season birds in the area. Read on for details!

Herb Myers heard a **Yellow-breasted Chat** on the Western Slope of Massanutten Mtn on June 5.

Scott Priebe reported the continuing **Mourning Warbler**, as well as a late **Magnolia Warbler**, on Hone Quarry Ridge Trail on Shenandoah Mtn on June 5.

Randy Cline reported a **Yellow-breasted Chat** on the Friendly City Trail on June 7.

Karen Seward found two singing **Yellow-throated Warblers** on Little Dry River Rd on June 7. This species is rarely seen in the county and, when reported, is usually during Spring migration. Karen found another **Yellow-throated Warbler** on Bergton Rd on June 21, and Matt Gingerich found one at the Bergton Blue Hole picnic area on July 7. This area of the county will be worth keeping an eye on in years to come to try to document breeding activity for this species.

A **Black Tern** at Silver Lake was reported on eBird on June 10. Ben Spory and William Leigh got the word out and many were able to see the tern.

Herb Myers reported a **Caspian Tern** at Lake Shenandoah on June 20. Unfortunately, Herb also reported a female **Orchard Oriole** feeding a fledgling **Brown-headed Cowbird**.

Matt Gingerich reported a **Great Egret** near his place in Linville on June 29.

James Shank reported a singing **White-throated Sparrow** at his place on July 2!

Mike Smith reported an **Osprey** along the Shenandoah River on July 9.

Greg Moyers found a pair of **Barred Owls** on Madison Run Fire Rd on July 11.

Diane Lepkowski spotted a **Wild Turkey** with young in the field across from her house near Harrisonburg on July 13.

Karen Shank had a **Pine Siskin** visit her feeder for several days beginning July 20.

Matt Gingerich spotted a **Swallow-tailed Kite** from his place in Linville on July 29. Over the following two weeks plus, two **Swallow-tailed Kites** were routinely seen in the area of Woodlands Church Rd, Wengers Mill Rd, and Williamsburg Rd. Vic Laubach reported that a third **Swallow-tailed Kite** briefly joined the others on Aug. 8.

Lisa Koerner Perry spotted the **Crested Caracara** flying over Rt. 42 while on her way back to Broadway after viewing the kites on July 30.

Craig Zook found a **Black Tern** at Lake Shenandoah on Aug. 2.

William Leigh reported a singing **Dickcissel** on Williamsburg Rd on Aug. 2.

Kaitlyn Silver reported a **Peregrine Falcon** near the intersection of Woodlands Church Rd and Williamsburg Rd on Aug. 8.

Tim Showalter Ehst reported an immature **Yellow-crowned Night Heron** just over the county line in Shenandoah County on Plains Mill Rd on Aug. 12. The bird was spotted on both sides of the county line over the next couple of days. Karen Seward and Diane Holsinger each later reported seeing a second **Yellow-crowned Night Heron** here.

Greg Moyers reported a **Yellow-breasted Chat** at Hillandale Park on Aug. 22.

After reports in nearby counties, Matt Gingerich did a hawk watch for **Mississippi Kites** at his place near Linville on Aug. 22. As he was about to pack it in, Matt spotted four **Mississippi Kites**! Over the next week, as many as eight **Mississippi Kites** were reported in the Linville area. Greg Moyers watched one bird drop down in the pasture behind the Linville Ruritan picnic area on Aug. 26 and was able to locate two snags where all eight kites eventually came in to perch.

Chris Lehman reported two **Semipalmated Plovers** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on Aug. 23.

Common Nighthawks were on the move the last week of August. Mike Smith reported one flying over Elkton on Aug. 25. On Aug. 28, Greg Moyers reported over 50 at Bluestone Vineyards west of Bridgewater, Lisa Koerner Perry had a similar number in Broadway, and Nathan Martin reported 30-50 in Mauzy.

Cory Taylor reported seven **Black Terns** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on Aug. 26.

Chris Lehman and Ben Spory found an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** on FR 539, Hone Quarry Ridge Trail, on Shenandoah Mtn on Aug. 27.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bluebird trail leaders needed

The Rockingham Bird Club is seeking one person to act as a volunteer **Bluebird Trail Coordinator**. This person will coordinate the scheduling of the Bluebird Trail monitors, the compilation of the nesting data collected by the monitors, and any necessary maintenance of the nest boxes.

The Club is also seeking **two Bluebird Committee members** to assist the Coordinator. The folks who take on these leadership positions will enjoy the added interest of considering a new location for the bluebird trail that might provide for more successful nesting and perhaps provide greater public visibility for the trail.

Please express your interest in these positions by contacting club president Mike Donaldson via the [Contact Us form on our Club website](#).

Bird Seed Sale News

Our annual bird seed sale is underway! Many members gave Lizzie Mae's bird seed high marks last year, so we're delighted to be purchasing fresh seed from them again this fall.

We encourage you to shop our online store: <https://rockinghambirdclub.com/bird-seed-sale/>. Or print a paper form and return with your check. All orders are due by October 3 with pickup at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds on October 24.

Volunteers are needed to assist with a variety of tasks. Let Cindy Smoker know via phone or text [540-746-6932](tel:540-746-6932), email (cindy.smoker@gmail.com) or at the September meeting if you can help.

- 2 persons with strong arms and backs to help Cindy organize the pickup area on Friday, October 23. Ability to bring a wheelbarrow or wagon a plus!
- 1 person to handle snacks for the volunteers on pickup day
- 15-18 persons to pull orders and transfer them to customer vehicles on pickup day (8 a.m. to 12 noon). Strong arms and backs helpful as bags of seed range from 10 to 40 lbs.

Thanks for your support of this club project!

Cindy Smoker, Seed Sale Coordinator

Membership Dues

Important! To keep your membership in good standing, please renew ***before November 1***. The RBC membership year runs from August to July. Dues are payable annually starting any time after July 1 for the coming year and are not pro-rated. In keeping with RBC by-laws, members who have not paid dues by November 2026 will be dropped from the Club roster and mailing lists.

Dues:

Individual: \$20

Family: \$30

Student: \$10

If you paid for your membership online in the last two years and selected the auto-renew function, your renewal will automatically happen on September 1 unless you cancel the auto-renewal. We have changed our renewal cycle going forward so if you join or renew online this year, your membership will be set to expire on July 31. This means that you will get a reminder notice to renew in early July next year or, if you choose to auto-renew, that will happen August 1.

Pay for your membership online at <https://rockinghambirdclub.com/join-or-renew/> using a credit card via Zeffy or bring a check or cash to the monthly meeting.

Alternatively, you can mail a check made out to “RBC” to:

Audrey Shenk, RBC Treasurer
949 Northfield Ct.
Harrisonburg, VA 22802

Bird Club Book Club (BCBC)

The bird club book club (BCBC) will meet by ZOOM at 6:00 PM on Thursday, September 17 to discuss ***The Uninhabitable Earth: Life after Warming*** by David Wallace-Wells. In October, our book selection is ***What the Chicken Knows*** by Sy Montgomery. 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.



Barred Owl – Madison Run Fire Rd, July 11, 2026

Photo credit: Greg Moyers



Mississippi Kite – Linville Edom Rd, August 26, 2026

Photo credit: Greg Moyers

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, Miranda Troyer

GOLDFINCH GAZETTE – Denise Hoodock

HISTORIAN – Art Fovargue

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT – Bill Benish

EMAIL: info@rockinghambirdclub.com

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