



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume LII

Number 2

Oct 2026

DATE: Thursday, October 8, 2026

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: *Cooper's Hawks in the Neighborhood* presented by Bob Martin of Harrisonburg, VA.

Join us for a photographic journey into many aspects of the Cooper's Hawk lifecycle right in our own backyard near Harrisonburg's Friendly City Trail. Anecdotal commentary will be supplemented by useful data and current research.

Bob is a Valley native who counts nature photography among his retirement pursuits and most recently worked at JMU Libraries after a construction industry career.

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, October 13

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.

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 have 2 outings remaining:

October 2, 7 am at Hillandale Park

October 9, 7 am at the VMRC farm

Allegheny Front Migration Observatory - Monday, October 5

Every fall, the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory conducts a bird banding station to capture and band migrating songbirds. Located on the eastern edge of Dolly Sods Wilderness Area, this location offers some beautiful scenery with the chance of seeing some migrants up close, and possibly even in hand! Check out their website for more information (<https://www.brooksbirdclub.org/afmo-bird-banding.html>). While there, we will do some birding and hopefully see the banding process. We may also watch for migrating raptors and explore the Bear Rocks geological formation at the north end of the Sods.

Because of the distance to this location (2+ hr drive), we will plan to leave early in hopes of arriving at

a good time to observe the migrants and banding process. We will likely be there most of the day, so plan to bring food and water. We will arrange carpooling options when I have an idea of participant numbers. If you wish to drive separately, you can also plan to meet us there on your own timing.

I apologize for the late notice of this trip. Please contact Matt Gingerich asap to sign up. (fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com)

Starry Meadows - Fall Field Walk - Saturday, October 17, 8:00 am

Join us for a fall walk at Starry Meadows north of Singer's Glen. Rockingham Bird Club members, Jay and Sharon Landis are the owners and stewards of Starry Meadows. They have done extensive work on their property to support and attract wildlife. Most notable are the large plantings of native wildflowers and grasses. The mix of habitats on the property and the views of Little North Mountain will not disappoint! Birds to look for include Red-headed Woodpeckers, many sparrows, migrating raptors, and other fall arrivals. Space is limited to 15 participants. Please contact Matt Gingerich (fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com) to sign up and for directions.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Bird Walk – Kathy Byers

The weather for our Tuesday, September 8 walk was quite nice with blue sky and good temperatures. A Baltimore Oriole and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo seen from the parking lot was a great start for our group of eight. The group noted the quiet lack of noisy mowers as we started for the walnut grove. Then we noted that the grass was rather tall and wet and was hiding the perilous fallen walnuts! With a few words of caution, we moved on and were soon rewarded with a flurry of birds flitting about in the walnut trees. A few members discussed the possible reasons that the walnut trees often seemed to hold a lot of birds. Do the walnuts draw in bugs which then draw in the birds, or do we just see more birds because their foliage is rather sparse compared to other trees such as oaks? Regardless of the answer, we were grateful to have the challenge of identifying the small hyper-feeders above us. The small birds kept our pace slow, and it took quite a while to reach the bike path. Just minutes after Kathy Byers and Randy Cline mentioned seeing an Osprey fly over two days earlier, the group was surprised as one flew past.

A Wilson's Warbler was quite the crowd pleaser giving us nice views and displaying its black cap. A total of 38 species including several flycatchers and eight species of warblers were seen.

Hillandale First Birds of Fall Walk – Tom Mizell

It was 53° and my windshield wipers were active when I arrived at the Hillandale Park Shelter on the first full day of Fall! With the chilly and rainy weather conditions I was both surprised and pleased that more folks showed up than I expected. Twelve members of the Rockingham Bird Club arrived by ones and twos for our September 23 walk. Our wish list included Northern Flicker, Broad-wing Hawk, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Philadelphia Vireo, Black-billed Cuckoo and Kirkland Warbler. Guess which two we saw? Before I go further I'll share an anonymous quote:

"I kept thinking what a funny thing birding is. Especially in uncomfortable weather. And then my next thought was, 'These folks are awesome, hardy nature lovers and I'm so glad to know them!'Don't you like that description?"

We began when Mike Donaldson spotted a Cuckoo just west of the shelter. The group massed and followed a couple of Cuckoos and tried hard to distinguish which Cuckoo species they were but to no avail. It was interesting and challenging, but we finally moved on around 8:50 AM leaving behind a couple perhaps smiling mystery cuckoos.

The gray and darkened skies made bird ID difficult. It was a misty and slow-starting bird sightings morning but, we persevered and eventually we were led to some surprising feeding episodes. We were not disappointed as we got our share of many warbler neck experiences for this first full day of Fall! But I'm getting ahead of myself...

As we left the Cuckoo around 8:50 AM it seemed the bird sightings were a bit slow. We added Eastern Wood Pewee, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal and Gray Catbird.

We paused and posed on the NW Corner Pedestrian Bridge at 9:15.



Things were still fairly slow. In this Northwest corner we added Hairy Woodpecker, "show me a Swift", (that's how it originally appeared as I dictated this report) Barn Swallow, Carolina Wren, Downy Woodpecker and the first warbler of Fall was a female America Redstart. For a while the group was content to call it a "Yellowstart". It was 9:20 and so in the first hour we had only seen 12 species.

At 9:30 we crossed the still unnamed concrete slab, and we didn't know that excitement was drawing near as we continued on the gravel trail bordering the golf course woods. After a slow start Bingo! The canopy was alive with warblers. And we all know they don't dare to stay still but are constantly moving quickly feeding and/or chasing others away. Conversation picked up as the binoculars were lifted up. Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Cape May, Black-throated Green and Bay-breasted Warblers were seen as they flitted about and enjoyed a breakfast buffet overhead. Carolina Chickadee and a White-breasted Nuthatch fed with the warblers. A Rose-breasted Grosbeak pleased us as well.

During the various warbler appearances, the conversation was lively. One person said, "I saw half of a Magnolia!" Another said, "That's a good tree!" Yet another of the group said, "I see lots of yellow." And of course, we often heard "It's in that tree" and "It flew away."

After quite a frenzy we moved on. Many using one of those expressions that contains a four letter word "Warbler neck". We reached the fork in the trail that opens up to the old log cabin site, and the cuckoos were seen again. In the next 20 minutes we added Northern Flicker and Kathy Byers spotted a Brown Thrasher. As we looked at the Thrasher and heard its "click" an American Crow called. Before we

reached the Bike Trail, where the high voltage lines cross, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo was confirmed. Eastern Bluebirds scattered as we reached the Bike trail. Walking the small loop to the south of the bike trail we added Eastern Phoebe, House Finch and Scarlet Tanager.

It was about 10:10 when I left the group. Seven birders remained to bird on! When I reached the shelter parking lot a Pileated Woodpecker called. It was still misting when I left at 10:30. The remaining 7 were some of the previously mentioned “awesome, hardy nature lovers.” They soon added Mourning Dove, Turkey Vulture, Tufted Titmouse, European Starling, Northern Mockingbird, American Robin and an Eastern Towhee.

As the final 7 drew near the shelter, 3 hours after the walk began, they added Tennessee Warbler and Broad-winged Hawk. It was a fun morning with 39 species giving us a lot of enjoyment this first full day of Fall! Hope to see you Tuesday October 13 at Hillandale Park!

Fall Migrant Forest Road Hike – *Matt Gingerich*

September 12th was a misty and foggy morning. As club members gathered at the meeting place, we wondered if the fog would hamper our efforts. As we drove up Long Run Road, the fog only got thicker and we were very skeptical.

Once we started our hike, it didn't take long until we encountered the first flock. Small birds were actively flitting in the treetops overhead. It was exciting, but also quite frustrating. Fall warblers are notoriously difficult to identify, let alone trying to see them through a cloud of mist. The stark markings of a Black-and-white Warbler were greatly appreciated, and it was one of the few warblers we could easily identify. As we walked, we encountered several other small, mixed flocks of migrants; mostly warblers mixed with the local Black-capped Chickadees.

About 1 mile into our walk, we came to a large, open parking area that has some good edge habitat. A good mix of warbler actively worked its way through a patch of young saplings. Cape May, Tennessee, Chestnut-sided Warblers and American Redstarts were eye-level and gave good views to most of the group.

The most exciting part of the morning was when Chris Lehman noticed a large warbler pop up from the dense brush. A brief glimpse got us suspicious this could be something exciting. We all gathered around and carefully scoured the brush. Then a bit of movement caught our eye, and there sat a Connecticut Warbler! Though often secretive and hard to see, this bird cooperated just enough to allow the entire group to get views. It perched in sight and even preened a bit to provide enough movement for folks to detect its location.

All in all, it was a productive and exciting morning of birding. After seeing the Connecticut Warbler, we were all definitely walking in the clouds.

Scenic Hawkwatch from Blackrock Summit – *Matt Gingerich*

Blackrock Summit is admittedly one of my favorite places in Shenandoah National Park. The views never disappoint and often the birds cooperate too. I was excited that a group of club members was willing to join me for an early morning hike in the dark to experience this place as the day began. Even before the light came, we were experiencing birds in migration. Calls from birds flying overhead caught our attention. We couldn't really identify them, but it was mesmerizing at the least. A Barred Owl called from down in a holler and a few coyotes chimed in.

As the light grew in the east, the first birds of the morning were a family of Common Ravens that burst above the eastern ridge in playful flight. They must have slept well, because they were full of energy from the start. Their black silhouettes against the orange sky was striking as they swirled and spiraled through the air. Several bats were also flying around and passing by. Some of us even caught a glimpse of a Merlin swooping up to try to grab a bat for breakfast!

Throughout the morning, we watched many small warblers flying past overhead. We couldn't positively identify them. Most of them seemed to be Cape May Warblers. One or two male Black-throated Blue Warblers were distinct enough to identify.

We waited for the hawks to lift off as the day started to warm. A few young Sharp-shinned Hawks kept us entertained as they swooped around the mountaintop throughout the morning. They may have fledged somewhere in the mountains nearby, as they seemed to be local birds that were quite vocal at times.

Eventually a few Broad-winged Hawks and Cooper's Hawks made their way past our perch. It was by no means a productive morning of Hawk Watching, but the hawks we saw came overhead and gave us great looks. Eventually some clouds moved in from the west. The day and the hawks never really heated up. Sometimes that's how it goes with bird watching

Chimney Swift Roost Watch – Matt Gingerich

Well, we were too late. In my attempt to schedule the field trips throughout the month, this one got pushed back too late. The swifts had already moved on and started their migration journey. Perhaps we will check back in next year.

However, it was not all a loss! We did see and hear a few birds, AND a few bats! One of our participants shared her extensive knowledge about bats and their habits and status. Similar to the swifts, some bats will roost in groups in chimneys and trees. Perhaps we will learn more about these other flying creatures at some point in the future!

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Tim Showalter-Ehst reported **Pectoral Sandpipers**, along with several peeps and a yellowlegs at the Windmill Lane farm pond on Rt. 257 on Sept. 1.

Herb Myers reported two **Blackburnian Warblers** in a mixed flock at his place in Keezletown on Sept. 3.

William Leigh found a **Blue-winged Warbler** at Hillandale Park on Sept. 5.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski photographed an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** at Switzer Dam on Sept. 6.

Allen Lerner reported a **Baird's Sandpiper** at Turner Sod Farm on Captain Yancey Rd on Sept. 6.

Bonita Zimmerman reported a **Semipalmated Plover** at the intersection of Silver Creek and Beaver Creek Rds on Sept. 7. William Leigh found an **American Golden Plover** at the same spot on Sept. 11.

Chris Lehman reported a **Golden-winged Warbler** at Switzer Dam on Sept. 7. On the same date, Greg Moyers reported a **Golden-winged Warbler** in a large mixed flock at Swift Run Overlook on Skyline Drive.

Matt Gingerich found four **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** on Lumber Mill Rd on Sept. 11. Tim Showalter-Ehst reported four **American Golden Plovers** at the same spot later the same day. The **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** continued to be seen on Lumber Mill and Honey Run Rds through Sept. 22. Karen Seward had 30 **American Golden Plovers** at Lumber Mill Rd on Sept. 21. Matt Gingerich found a **Black-bellied Plover** with 55 **American Golden Plovers** at the Lumber Mill Rd spot on Sept. 22. Other birders reported two **Black-bellied Plovers** later the same day.

The RBC group lead by Matt Gingerich found a **Connecticut Warbler** on the field trip to Second Mountain Trail on Sept. 12. Tim Showalter-Ehst had a **Connecticut Warbler** at his place, Second Mountain Farm, on the same date.

Greg Moyers reported a **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** and a **Wilson's Warbler** at Hillandale Park on Sept. 12.

Greg Moyers recorded a **Summer Tanager** calling at Switzer Dam on Sept. 13.

William Leigh reported 20 **Broad-winged Hawks** migrating over Hone Quarry Ridge Trail on Shenandoah Mtn on Sept. 14.

Cory Taylor reported a **Sanderling** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on Sept. 18. The following day, Cory reported a **Baird's Sandpiper** at the same location.

Matt Gingerich reported the continuing **Crested Caracara** along Zion Church Rd in Broadway on Sept. 21. Peter Norment photographed the **Caracara** at the same location on Sept. 26.

Mike Smith reported an **Orange-crowned Warbler** in a mixed flock of warblers at Baldface Mtn Overlook on Skyline Drive on Sept. 21.

Matt Gingerich reported a **White-rumped Sandpiper** at the Windmill Lane farm pond off Ottobine Rd on Sept. 23.

Herb Myers reported several warblers, including **Cape May**, **Magnolia**, and **Black-throated Green**, along with a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** on the western slope of Massanutten Mtn on Sept. 25.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Kate Komorous to direct RBC's Bluebird Trail – *Mike Donaldson, President*

I am very pleased to announce that I have appointed Kate Komorous as Chair of the Bluebird Monitoring Committee. As part of this role, Kate will also serve on the Club's Executive Committee. Huge thanks to Kate for stepping up to serve in these important roles.

Many thanks also to **Randy Cline** for his outstanding work in leading the Bluebird Trail for the past two years. Randy plans to continue working on the Bluebird Trail as a nest box monitor.

Please note that we continue to look for two people to join the Bluebird Monitoring Committee to help Kate with various tasks and decision making. To volunteer or obtain more information, please talk to Kate at the upcoming Club meeting or contact her via the [Contact Us form on our Club website](#).

Rockingham's Next 10

Ruff, Inca Dove, Crested Caracara, Western Tanager, Cave Swallow, MacGillivray's Warbler, Roseate Spoonbill, Swallow-tailed Kite, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Bullock's Oriole.

You might think this list came from Texas, but these are our 10 most recent County First records for Rockingham/Harrisonburg! Amazingly, all of these were within the past six years. Currently, our County List stands somewhere around 315 species, give or take a few. (Check out our Birds of Rockingham County Virginia book to see detailed descriptions of most of these species records).

So, what will be the next 10 new birds for Rockingham?

If you enjoy dreaming and speculating, I invite you to come up with your own "Next Top Ten" list of birds that you think will show up in Rockingham sometime soon. Please submit your list and the compiled results will be published in an upcoming newsletter.

Part of birding is anticipation. If we think more broadly and prepare for what might be, we may just be better attuned to pick out that next rarity. The most recent addition, the Ruff, was one year ago, so we are due for another new record soon!

Please email your lists to fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com before November 1st.

Bird Seed Sale Update

If you placed a bird seed order, please remember to pick it up on **Sat, Oct 24 between 8:30-11:30 a.m.** The seed will be located in the Poultry Exhibit Building at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds ([4808 S Valley Pike, Harrisonburg, VA 22801](https://www.rockinghamcountyva.gov/4808/S-Valley-Pike,-Harrisonburg,-VA-22801)). Follow the signs and enter through Gate 5. Please stay in your vehicle and volunteers will bring your order to you.

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

- 1 person to handle snacks for the volunteers
- 15-18 persons to pull orders and transfer them to customer vehicles (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

Christmas Bird Count Update – *Bill Benish, “VARC” CBC Rockingham County Circle Compiler*

Please mark your calendar for this year’s CBC date - **Saturday, December 19, 2026.**

Several field party sector leaders have confirmed their plans to lead again. I’ll be firming up with the rest of the leaders soon. Some of these leaders for this long-running citizen science effort will need helpers in the field.

Field participants can contribute in several ways including listening, spotting, driving, recording data, documenting unusual species and sharing their experiences as companions.

We always hope to make space for anyone who wants to join, and I’ll keep a list of potential participants if all the spaces fill up.

Also, folks who live inside the circle may be able to help by counting birds at home as a “Feeder Watcher”. Please contact Bill Benish at wcbenish@gmail.com if you may be able to join this coordinated effort or if you have any questions.

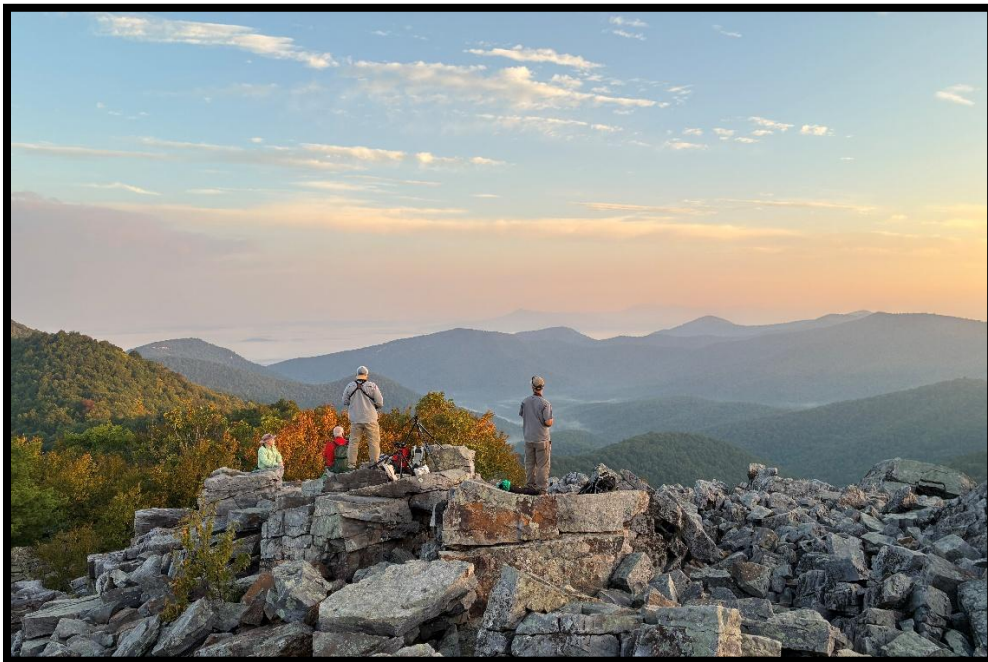
Bird Club Book Club (BCBC)

The BCBC will meet by ZOOM at 6:00 PM on Thursday, October 15 to discuss *What the Chicken Knows* by Sy Montgomery. Our November book selection is *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World* by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

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.



Common Yellowthroat – Hone Quarry Ridge Trail, September 7, 2026
Photo credit: Mike Donaldson



Scenic Sunrise Hawkwatching – Blackrock Summit, September 18, 2026
Photo credit: Matt Gingerich

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

BLUEBIRD MONITORING COMMITTEE CHAIR – Kate Komorous

EMAIL: info@rockinghambirdclub.com

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