Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

https://rockinghambirdclub.com

Volume LII **Number 3** **Nov 2026**

DATE: Thursday, November 12, 2026

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: ***Painting Birds: A Step-by-Step Process*** presented by award-winning wildlife artist, Lucinda Rowe

Within this presentation, Lucinda breaks down her process of painting a bird, from choosing the right reference photo, sketching out the initial shapes and composition, laying down the first washes of color, all the way through building up layer upon layer of watercolor until the painting is fully complete, feathers and all. Afterwards she will do a live watercolor demonstration.

Lucinda will bring ornaments, stickers, cards, pins, and original paintings available for purchase by card or cash.

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, November 10
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.

Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Station - Bergton - Monday, November 9, 5:30 PM
Join us for an evening trip to Highland Retreat in Bergton to check in on the Northern Saw-whet Owl banding station. Ben Spory and Chris Lehman are at it again this year, continuing the work of capturing and banding these small, migratory owls. They are already reporting success!

Please email fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com to sign up. Carpooling details can be arranged from Harrisonburg or Broadway.

High Knob Fire Tower Hike - Monday, November 16, 8:30AM
This is a moderately strenuous, 1.3 mile hike (2.6 total) to the top of High Knob on Shenandoah Mountain. This restored fire tower offers beautiful 360 degree views of the mountains of Virginia and West Virginia. We plan to watch for late-season migrating raptors as they move along the ridge. We could see Red-tailed Hawks, Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, Bald Eagles, and if we are lucky, we may see a Golden Eagle. (Dare we hope for an American Goshawk?!).

We will plan to leave Harrisonburg at 8:30AM. There is a half-hour drive to the trailhead. The hike could take 30-60 minutes to get to the tower, depending on our pace. Plan to pack food and water and plenty of layers. **__**It is Hunting Season. Wearing bright colors or blaze orange is recommended.**__** Email fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com to sign up.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Bird Walk – ***Tom Mizell***

On October 13, 2026, nine members of the Rockingham Bird Club were greeted with a beautiful blue sky morning at Hillandale Park. As we gathered at the parking lot near Shelter number 12 the temperature was 51 degrees, many birds were quite active flitting about feeding and we listed 10 species before 8:36 AM.

A couple from Franklin, Tennessee joined us momentarily in the lot as they were traveling back to Tennessee. They briefly viewed the Warblers in the overstory with club members, but they took flight back to Tennessee before we knew it! Should Roy and Betty check the Club website we were glad to meet you and hope you had safe travels back home.

Our wish list birds included Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Bay-breasted Warbler, Brown Creeper and White-crowned Sparrow. Once again the walnut crop was heavy near the parking lot and Kathy's impromptu "Minute for Safety" cautioned us to watch our step. A twisted ankle or fall can quickly turn a fun bird walk into a disaster!

Who were the early bird arrivals today? By 8:36 we sighted Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Common Grackle, White-breasted Nuthatch, a Northern Cardinal chipping, Blue Jays calling, Blue-headed Vireo, Bay-breasted and Black-throated Green Warblers fed and zipped about in the treetops around the shelter, Tree Swallow, and Eastern Bluebird rounded out the first 10. Tom spotted a Yellow-billed Cuckoo feeding above the second shelter, and we were all given very good looks as it put on a show in the sunlight. We then walked to the Northwest corner and added Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, American Robin and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. As usual we paid homage to the Cedar Tree adorned with lines of Sapsucker holes near the pedestrian bridge We added Northern Flicker and Pileated Woodpecker by 9:12 AM at the northwest corner.

As we walked along the golf course boundary we added Tough Ed Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, and Tennessee and Cape May Warblers. Now what did you just read? Forgive me for keeping "Tough Ed Titmouse" in the writeup but that's what appeared as I dictated these notes and I thought it might provide an opportunity to laugh out loud. Not sure if there are any more laughs herein so now is a good time to chuckle. At 9:35 AM we added Northern Mockingbird.

We arrived at the bike trail by 10 AM and added Eastern Phoebe, Turkey Vulture and House Finches. I had to leave at 10:40 AM. Those birders that remained for another hour added Mourning Dove, Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Black Vulture, Red-bellied Woodpecker, American Goldfinch and Eastern Towhee. Thirty-two species for the morning.

Please join us on Tuesday November 10 for our next walk. I will start the November Hillandale wish list now with the wish for a Turkey. Help us find it along with some of those winter sparrows that we sought in October!

Early Birding field trips – ***Andrew Troyer***

We completed another successful season of early birding! Generally, the fall trips were less fruitful than the spring and often the birds seemed to start singing around 8:00 a.m. when many of us had to begin work. However, there were several gems that made it worthwhile.

At the JMU Arboretum, Abby Herr told a story from her summer birding where she saw a Ruby-throated Hummingbird sharing a tree with a Blue Heron. We scored well in a similar category when we observed North America's largest woodpecker, the Pileated join a Ruby-throated Hummingbird in the same tree.

Hillandale Park offered excellent views of a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. We found a group of a variety of warblers including several Blackburnian, Bay-breasted, Cape May, and Black-throated Greens.

On the final trip to the VMRC Farm at Willow Run, we found a wide variety of sparrows (Chipping, Field, White-crowned, White-throated, Song, Swamp, and Savannah) as well as warblers (Tennessee, Nashville, Yellowthroat, Cape May, Palm, Yellow-rumped). Matt Gingerich also spotted and later identified an Eastern Marsh Wren.

Allegheny Front Migration Observatory – ***Herb Myers***

On Monday, October 5, eight intrepid birders got up early and headed to West Virginia to the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory (AFMO). This banding station is located on the Allegheny Front in Dolly Sods across from the Red Creek Campground.

We were not disappointed as it was a chilly but beautiful morning with lots of birds. The banding station was active with warblers (Bay-breasted, Blackpoll, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Tennessee, Northern Parula, Ovenbird), Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Blue-headed Vireo and a feisty Blue Jay. Matt's son, with a big smile on his face, got to release a Magnolia Warbler. Chris Lehman was also smiling as he got to assist with recording the banded birds.

There was a lot of scanning the area. Multiple raptors were seen from the small American Kestrels and Merlins to large Bald Eagles and a Golden Eagle. A Peregrine Falcon flew past.

We spent most of the morning at the banding station. After eating our packed lunches, we explored Bear Rocks and then Seneca Rocks. At the latter, we had both Swainson's and Gray-cheeked Thrushes along with Cedar Waxwings feeding over Seneca Creek.

We returned to Harrisonburg tired but filled with the joys of experiencing tiny warblers up close. The fall colors were near their peak at the high elevation of Dolly Sods, especially the huckleberry plains. One person remarked that it was one of the best birding trips ever!

Starry Meadows - Fall Field Walk

Saturday, October 17 was a blustery and chilly morning for our walk at Starry Meadows. Overnight rain showers still hung on for the early part of the morning. Our small group bundled up and headed downhill toward the creek to escape the cold, North wind. We discussed our route but opted to let the birds decide for us. We would go where the birds were. We quickly spotted a small group of sparrows and some Eastern Bluebirds. We quickly backtracked to drop down into the ravine. Sparrows flashed

ahead of us. Song Sparrows popped up and quickly darted away. A tawny Field Sparrow teed up nicely and we had some close-up views through the spotting scope. A Swamp Sparrow's thick "chup" call came from a dense bunch of grass, but it did not cooperate. It seemed the songbirds were just about as thrilled about the weather as we were.

There were some raptors on the move. Several Bald Eagles, an Osprey and a few Red-tailed Hawks were spotted moving along the ridge of Little North Mountain. An American Kestrel came in and passed over the open fields. However, we missed out on the Red-headed Woodpeckers. Perhaps next time.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Kevin Shank reported a flock of around a dozen **Eurasian Collared-Doves** feeding in the road on Limestone Lane west of Dayton on Sept. 28.

Mike Donaldson found a **Connecticut Warbler** at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at JMU on Sept. 30.

Huck Hutchens photographed a plover at Leonard's Pond on Oct. 1. After Common Ringed Plover gained consideration after that species had recently been seen in the state, most who weighed in settled on the bird being the more expected **Semipalmated Plover**.

Greg Moyers reported 16 warbler species at Hillandale Park on Oct. 3, including **Blackpoll, Bay-breasted**, **Magnolia, Tennessee, Blackburnian**, and a late **Prairie Warbler**. Greg reported a late **Yellow-breasted Chat** at Hillandale on Oct. 4.

Diane Lepkowski photographed a **Black-throated Blue Warbler** at her yard water feature near Harrisonburg on Oct. 4.

Matt Gingerich and the early morning birders found a **Marsh Wren** on the RBC walk at the VMRC Willow Run Farm on Oct. 9.

William Leigh reported a **Lincoln's Sparrow** and **Palm Warblers** at the Crist Farm Walking Trail in Bridgewater on Oct. 10.

Mike Donaldson reported a **Marsh Wren** at Lake Shenandoah on Oct. 12.

An anonymous eBirder reported a probable **Black-billed Magpie** at the Sentara RMH pond/parking lot area on Oct. 12. Kathy Byers spotted the bird later the same day. There was an unconfirmed eBird report of the bird at the same spot on Oct. 14, though that list was later deleted.

An **American White Pelican**, first spotted by Henry Hawkins at Lake Shenandoah on Oct. 14**,** was in the area until Oct. 17, with sightings at both Lake Shenandoah and Lake Campbell.

Herb Myers reported **a Lincoln's Sparrow** and a **Magnolia Warbler** at Lake Shenandoah on Oct. 16.

Diane Holsinger found four **Surf Scoters** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on Oct. 20. One **Surf Scoter** continued to be reported through at least Oct. 30. Diane and Scott Priebe also saw the **Crested Caracara** near Zion Mennonite Church on Oct. 20.

Cory Taylor found a **Clay-colored Sparrow** in a large flock of sparrows near Turleytown Rd on Oct. 24.

Herb Myers heard a pair of **Great Horned Owls** calling on Massanutten Mtn and had a pair of **Purple Finches** at his feeder in Keezletown on Oct. 24.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Seeking New Club President – *Mike Donaldson, President*

As I announced at the October meeting, I feel that this is the right time for me to transition out of the role of President, and I believe the Club will benefit from having a new person in this role. Therefore, the office of President will be open in the Club's next election, which will be held at the May 2027 meeting.

Primary responsibilities of the President include running the business meeting portion of monthly Club meetings and conducting at least three Executive Committee meetings per year. The most important qualification of a President is to be organized enough to keep things running smoothly, which tends to be relatively easy, given the strong team that we have and the division of workload across the different roles.

Please contact me via the RBC Contact Us webpage if you would like to run for Club President or would like additional details about the role of President.

Thanks for Another Successful Bird Seed Sale

Thanks to everyone who supported the club through the purchase of bird seed. Pickup day ran smoothly with many buyers commenting on the quality of the seed from Lizzie Mae's. We look forward to sharing it with our feathered friends especially as cooler weather approaches.

A special shout out to Annie Shank for making 325 peanut butter suet cakes. They are a fan favorite and sell out every year. If you happen to have any plastic containers from store-bought suet, please save them for Annie to use as molds for next year's suet.

Proceeds from this year's sale will benefit several ornithology and conservation programs. Thanks again for your generous support!

Cindy Smoker, Seed Sale Coordinator

Christmas Bird Count Date Reminder – *Bill Benish, "VARC" CBC Rockingham County Circle Compiler*

We are planning our "VARC" Christmas Bird Count for ***Saturday, 12/19/2026***. I am still in the process of contacting and coordinating leaders and potential participants who signed up to join this year's effort. If you didn't yet have a chance to sign up and may be able to join, please email me/Bill via wcbenish@gmail.com.

Rockingham's Next 10

It's not too late! I have not yet compiled the responses for the "Rockingham's Next 10". Please send in your predictions. American White Pelican is now out of the running! (See last month's Newsletter for details.)

Please email your lists to Matt Gingerich at fieldtrips@rockinghambirdclub.com before December 1st.

Bird Club Book Club (BCBC)

The BCBC will meet by ZOOM at 6:00 PM on Thursday, November 19 to discuss ***The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*** by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Our December book selection is ***The Feather Detective: Mystery, Mayhem, and the Magnificent Life of Roxy Laybourne*** by Chris Sweeney.

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.



Cape May Warbler – Lake Shenandoah, October 12, 2026
Photo credit: Mike Donaldson



American White Pelican – Lake Shenandoah, October 16, 2026
Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski



Eastern Phoebe – Hillandale Park, October 13, 2026
Photo credit: Zach Perdue

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VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAMS – Kathy Byers

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CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT – Bill Benish

BLUEBIRD MONITORING COMMITTEE CHAIR – Kate Komorous

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