



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<http://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume XLI

Number 5

January 2016

JANUARY MEETING

DATE: Thursday, January 7, 2016

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Detwiler Auditorium, Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, 1501 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA 22802

PROGRAM - *Denise Hoodock*

This month we welcome Dr. Jerry Via, Assistant Dean in the College of Science at Virginia Tech, where he teaches courses in freshman biology and ornithology. His program, "***Bird Migration***", will include the how and why of migration with a focus on the methods of navigation that birds use to get to their destination. Several species will be featured as examples of migration through our area.

Before the meeting, we will be hosting Jerry at Union Station, 128 West Market Street, in Harrisonburg, for dinner at 5:30 PM. Please contact Denise Hoodock at 540-828-2595, 703-216-5499 or dhoodock@gmail.com if you'll join us for dinner.

JANUARY FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski*

Hillendale Park with Tom Mizell – Meet at the children's playground at 8:00 AM. Date to be announced at the January RBC meeting.

Lake Shenandoah, Saturday January 9, Greg Moyers: We will meet in the parking lot at the Lake at 8:30 AM. Remember, Lake Shenandoah is a VDGIF fee area, requiring an access permit or VA hunting/fishing/boating license. **Please contact Greg at gwmoyers@msn.com or 434-3029 if you plan to attend.**

Highland County, Saturday January 23, Mike Shank: Meet at 7:30 AM at the Bob-a-Rea's parking lot (SW of Bob-a-Rea's, intersection of N. Main & Green St. in Bridgewater) across from the Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Department. Bring lunch, snacks and drinks and dress warmly; Highland is usually colder than Harrisonburg. Restroom facilities are limited. **Please contact Mike at 540-810-7444 or tallwhiteoak@verizon.net if you plan to attend.**

BIRD CLUB BOOK CLUB - *Maureen Gallagher-McLeod*

The B.C.B.C. will meet at 6:30 PM on Thursday, January 21, 2016, in the home of Bill and Martha Faw. After sharing a carry-in meal, we will discuss "The Urban Bestiary" by Lyanda Lynn Haupi. If you are interested in joining the discussion, contact Maureen at famcleod@earthlink.net or 896-9541.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Park – *Tom Mizell*

Seasons greeting from the Red-shouldered Hawk and others at Hillandale Park! As I left my home around 7 AM on 14 December, the sun's early rising painted the eastern sky red. American Robins were conversing constantly and in great numbers as if it were spring. The thermometer boasted 63 degrees!

Eight members of the Rockingham Bird Club and a visitor found 27 species of birds celebrating the season at Hillandale Park. Our target species for this last week of fall included Winter Wren, Brown Creeper, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Yellow-rumped Warbler. As the sun touched the top of the massive transmission towers, Blue Jays flew in all directions. We approached the bridge at the cabin and saw American Robins, Carolina Wren, and Northern Cardinal, Juncos, Carolina Chickadees and several flocks of European Starlings. By 9:20 AM we reached the Northwest pedestrian bridge and added White-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Flicker, American Crow and Red-bellied Woodpecker pushing our total to 17 species.

A slight drizzle dampened the ground and as some were leaving a Red-shouldered Hawk caught our attention at the main shelter as it swooped down and then returned to the woods. Our seasoned birders walked into the woods and along the woods edge to find out if it had landed nearby. Then we spotted it in a nearby oak feasting on a late breakfast. All nine of us were afforded good looks at this treat. This bird knows how to pose! It was in the same general area where we found it last month and last year and perhaps it is getting to know us.

It approached 10:00 AM and several folks headed to other activities. As the remaining three approached the cabin again we were pleased to find a Hairy Woodpecker, Mourning Doves and flocks of Cedar Waxwings! A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker gave us a bird that we pursued to the cedars along the road. As we turned west to cross the cabin bridge a second time, something happened that none of us had observed before. The drizzle from the earlier rain wetted the flat limestone outcrop under the cedar tree that is near the trail and between the cabin and the stream channel. Apparently enough rain had fallen to fill the slight depressions affording a watering place for a multitude of birds. We watched Flickers, Doves, Robins, Waxwings, Cardinals, Gold and House Finches and Blue Jays walk and bob about together on the rock and drink from the tiny puddles. There was a hint of competition for a drink. The birds flew back and forth from the cedar tree and walnut trees to the flat rock, a pattern that repeated several times. A very interesting scene and it fascinated us for several minutes. A bird about the size of a sparrow with a "ponderous head" flew into the mix. It maintained a low profile and seemed to sport a collar. We hope with time and future visits we observe this bird again in order to identify it.

Even though we were focused on this ground performance, Don Perkuchin spotted a Cooper's Hawk circling overhead. Then we tore ourselves away from these Rock Stars and proceeded along the southeast loop. We were pleasantly surprised by 3 Fox Sparrows and 3 Yellow-rumped Warblers. So, we found two of our target species for the walk. We completed our walk about 11:30 AM with a total of 27 species. See you in Hillandale in 2016!

BIRD SIGHTINGS:

Ring-billed Gulls have made a good showing in the last month. Diane Lepkowski and William Leigh saw five at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 22, Diane Holsinger had one the following day at the same location, and Greg Moyers had a flock of 20 flying over Port Republic Rd near RMH on Nov. 30 as well as a single bird at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 5.

William Leigh had a Thanksgiving Day **Great Horned Owl** at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 26.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski saw a **Ruffed Grouse** and **Red-breasted Nuthatches** on the Bother Knob Rd on Nov. 27. On the way back down the mountain, a stop at Hone Quarry produced a very late **Common Yellowthroat**. Diane also had **Fox Sparrows** and an **Eastern Towhee** in her yard that day.

Diane Lepkowski reported a pair of **Common Loons** and seven **Hooded Mergansers** at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 30.

Ken and Mildred Ranck reported two **Dickcissels** visiting their feeder in Mt. Crawford on Dec. 1.

Ken Hinkle reported **Buffleheads** and **Scaup** at Silver Lake on Dec. 2. On the same date, Dave Wendelken reported **Common Loons, Buffleheads, Ring-necked Ducks, Ruddy Ducks, Pied-billed Grebes, American Black Duck,** and **Great Horned Owl** at Lake Shenandoah.

Diane Holsinger had a **Fox Sparrow** at her place on Dec. 5 and eight **Pine Siskins** on Dec. 8.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski found a flock of **Pine Siskins** on Cub Run Rd on Dec. 5. They had a **Red-shouldered Hawk** on East Point Rd on the same date. Greg also reported a **Horned Grebe** at Lake Shenandoah that day.

Gabriel Mapel and Vic Laubach reported at least two **Lapland Longspurs**, a large flock of **Horned Larks**, and **American Pipits** on Nicholson Rd and a **Bald Eagle** and **Savannah Sparrows** on Model Rd west of Elkton on Dec. 6.

Diane Lepkowski had a **Great Horned Owl** in her yard east of Harrisonburg on Dec. 8.

Rusty Blackbirds have been reported along Model Rd. Marshall Faintich and Walt Childs found one on Dec. 8 and William Leigh found five on Dec. 13.

Diane Holsinger and Kathy Byers found an out-of-season **Brown Thrasher** at Hillandale Park on Dec. 10. While there, they also got to see a **Red-shouldered Hawk** capture a snake.

Ken Hinkle also reported a December **Brown Thrasher** at his feeder on Dec. 13.

John Shea found 54 **Rusty Blackbirds** at Cook's Creek Arboretum on Dec. 13.

Three **Dunlins** were present at Leonard's Pond on Dec. 14. A follow-up report indicated that these were likely the same birds originally found by Diane Holsinger the previous afternoon. Diane also had a **Wilson's Snipe** at the pond on Dec. 13.

Andrew Clem found at least two dozen **Wilson's Snipe** in a field near the intersection of Oak Ridge Rd and Pleasant Valley Rd on Dec. 16.

Gabriel Mapel found at least one **Lapland Longspur** in a flock of **Horned Larks** on Scholars Rd on Dec. 16. A **Fox Sparrow** was seen a bit further up the road.

Diane Lepkowski and Greg Moyers found a **shrike** just outside Rockingham County on Wolf Ridge Rd in Augusta County during the Christmas Bird count on Dec. 19. Their photos, along with observations and photos of others, may prove this to be a **Northern** (vs. Loggerhead) **Shrike**. If so, this would likely be the first local record of the species. Ken Hinkle reported that his yard **Brown Thrasher** was good enough to put in an appearance for the CBC as well. Ken and Fletcher Bingham also reported a **Winter Wren** along the river in Bridgewater.

John Shea added another out-of-season bird to the December (and CBC Week) list with a **Northern Parula** at Bridgeview Park in Bridgewater on Dec. 20.



Northern Parula, Bridgeview Park

Found by, and photo by John Shea, 12-20-15

TREASURER'S REPORT - Steve White

This year's bird seed sale netted \$2,704.65 which compares well with our BSSD net fundraising totals for past years. A special note of thanks is due to our president, Debbie Harrison, who stepped in and took over managing the sale when no volunteers were forthcoming. We hope someone will offer to take on that job before next fiscal year begins in September. (Editor's note: Thankfully, Kathy Byers has stepped up to take on the job next fiscal year.)

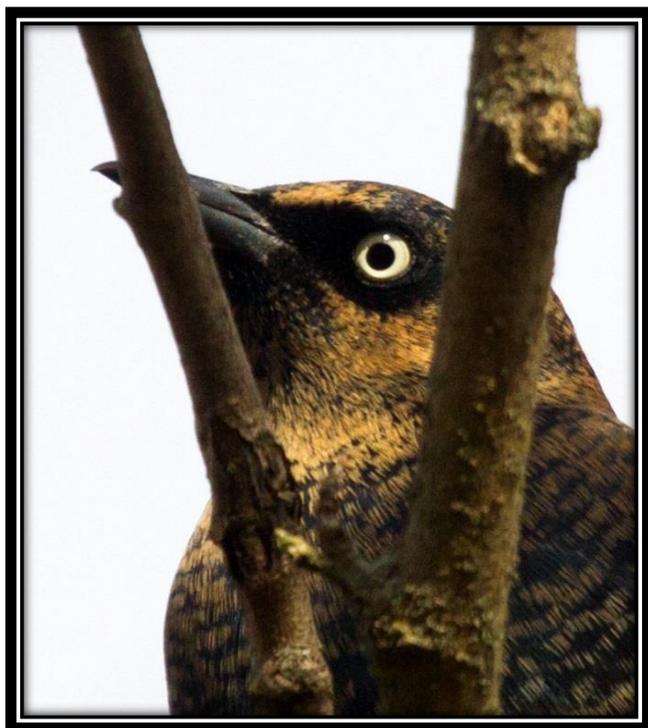
Special thanks as well go to our great master chefs who made all the hundreds of suet cakes - Shirley Knicely, Ralph & Kay Gibson, and the Shank family - Everette, Karen, and Annie. They not only

donated their time in producing these superior treats for our birds, they underwrote the enterprise by donating the cost of the ingredients. These cakes may cost a few cents more than the commercially prepared suet cakes you find in local retail stores, but if you have ever (as I have) conducted a taste test by juxtaposing commercial and the special RBC homemade suet cakes, you know how strongly and unanimously birds prefer the homemade variety.

Annual Donations

In accordance with our club's mission in furthering the study and appreciation of birds by making donations to conservation charities that share our interests, I have sent out checks in the amount of \$300.00 to the following organizations as determined by our Executive Committee: The Organization for Tropical Studies (La Selva), The Wildlife Center of Virginia, The American Bird Conservancy, The Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, Project Perry (Central Virginia Parrot Sanctuary), The Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary, and The Highland Retreat. A check for \$750.00 went to the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at James Madison University, and two more checks for \$150.00 each were sent to the Massanutten Regional Library and to The National Audubon Society, the latter in support of their help in our annual Christmas Bird Count.

I hope all members are as proud as I am of our involvement in all these great causes dedicated to the enjoyment and protection of birds and preservation of their nesting sites and key stops on their migration routes.



Rusty Blackbird, Cooks Creek Arboretum

Photo: Diane Lepkowski

MASSANUTTEN REGIONAL LIBRARY FEATURES THE RBC & CHRISTMAS BIRD

COUNT: Thanks to Cheryl Metz, Reference Librarian, and the Library for the informative “blog” article posted on their website. This is planned to be featured through the CBC Season:

<http://www.mrlib.org/whos-counting-the-birds-the-rockingham-county-bird-club/>

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I attended the VA Bluebird Society conference in Charlottesville on November 14, 2015, and learned a lot! I'd like to pass on a couple things, in addition to encouraging you to consider joining and/or check it out at www.virginiabluebirds.org.

It was a one-day conference, 9:30 to 2:30. In that time, there were the Elections of new board members, lunch, awards and door prizes, along with 3 presentations!

Some in attendance had problems with house sparrows in their bluebird houses and I learned that you can drill a 3" diameter hole in the roof, cover it with screen, and the house sparrows don't like that. But the bluebirds will still use the nest box! Just be sure you have drainage in the floor. (The parents will sit on the nest during rain.)

Dr. Caren Cooper, with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, spoke about Citizen Science (which is why we monitor our bluebird trail at Rockingham County Fairground). Here's a link to her work: [Citizen Science Projects - Caren Cooper](#)

The following is an excerpt from <http://www.carencooper.com/citizen-science-projects.html>:

House Sparrows as Bioindicators

Many birdwatchers in the United States routinely remove and discard non-native house sparrow eggs every year (legally) in hopes of protecting nest sites for native songbirds. Irrespective of participation in The Egg Swap, I'd like bird watchers to donate house sparrow eggs for curation at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. From curated eggs, we can potentially assess levels of flame retardants, heavy metals, pesticides, PCBs, and other contaminants that bioaccumulate in House Sparrow eggs. If House Sparrow eggs are an accurate biomarker reflecting human exposure, then their eggs could be useful for contaminant mapping, community-based monitoring, and other research activities.

The Sparrow Swap

In a new citizen science project, we are testing the effectiveness of different fake eggs in duping House sparrows into attending failed nests. Sometimes, when House sparrow nests are removed from a nestbox, the counterproductive result is that the sparrow pair moves and aggressively competes with a bluebird in a different box. It might be more effective to let House sparrows use once they've gain occupancy of it, and to keep them pre-occupied with that nest attempt for as long as possible, while ensuring the nest will fail. Removing House sparrow eggs and replacing them with fake eggs might keep sparrow pairs committed to a failed nest and therefore not bothering or harming nesting bluebirds.

We are creating two types of mimic eggs, available upon request to project participants: (1) painting wooden eggs and (2) painted plastic eggs from our 3D printer. Participants will monitor nest boxes,

and when they encounter a House sparrow nest with a completed clutch, they will remove the real eggs and replace with either a wooden or plastic clutch. The real eggs will be added and shipped to incorporate into the ornithology collection at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. The House sparrow eggs are useful for research to help us better understand the function of egg color and patterns, and for potentially using eggs as bioindicators of human exposure to environmental contaminants.

I also saw a new design for bluebird nesting boxes that include 2 holes, side by side, about 1" apart. This allows adults to escape in the presence of predators blocking the entrance hole! You can see the plans for building them here:

www.viriniabluebirds.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Violett2hm.pdf

Last, but not least, I learned that the VBS has grants available for a couple different things: build/refurbish bluebird trails on public land, youth/scout grants for materials to build nest boxes, and teachers who would like to monitor nesting boxes with cameras, for their classrooms. So, if you are (or know) a scout or teacher, have them check that out:

[Grant Programs](http://www.viriniabluebirds.org/about-vbs/grant-programs/) (<http://www.viriniabluebirds.org/about-vbs/grant-programs/>)

It was very informative and enjoyable for me!

Debbie

PS. I learned that baby puffins are called "pufflings". (Later, I wondered what baby starlings are called.)

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