



# Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

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December 2010

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## DECEMBER MEETING

**DATE:** Thursday, December 2, 2010

**TIME:** 7:00 PM

**PLACE:** Detweiler Auditorium VMRC - Rt. 42 North, Harrisonburg, VA

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**PROGRAM:** Our guest speakers for our December meeting are Will and Donna Hershberger of Hedgesville, WV. They operate Nature Images and Sounds ([www.natureimagesandsounds.com](http://www.natureimagesandsounds.com)) and speak frequently to bird clubs. Will is a co-founder of the Potomac Valley Nature Photographers. This month's topic is a seasonal journey through the cycle of birdsong in our area. It features an in-depth look at the complexity of the songs of certain species, detailing all the rich information that these birds are conveying to one another. **We will meet the Hershbergers earlier for dinner at Bravo Italian Eatery at 1647 East Market Street at 5:30 PM. If you wish to join us for dinner, please call Elizabeth Ihle at 234-8296.**

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## Field Trips – Diane Lepkowski

**Christmas Bird Count - Saturday, December 18** – Audubon's magazine publication summarizing the 110<sup>th</sup> count should have already arrived for last year's participants. We were advised that a record high 2,160 CBC's were held last year- 382 in Canada, 1671 in the U.S.A. and 107 across Latin America, the Caribbean, Bermuda, and the Pacific Islands. 60,000+ observers also set a record high. Data we gather from these counts helps benchmark avian population margins and means. The data points and analysis serve to help assess identifiable event related environmental impact, to alert us to current trends, and to set the stage for future understandings.

If you have not yet linked up with a group area leader, please contact Bill Benish by email and/or phone. Also, if you have already made arrangements, please advise Bill for administrative purposes in case of any last minute updates. This year's six excellent area leaders starting with Clair Mellinger in Area 1 in the northwest are followed clockwise by Tom Lord, Charles Ziegenfus, Bob Eggleston, William Leigh, and Ken Hinkle.

Some folks will go to the Thomas House around 1:00 PM for lunch. Robyn and Bill plan to host a chili dinner also - details will be provided to those who may be able to join us. **Contact Bill Benish, Coordinator, at 540-908-7336 and/or [wcbenish@verizon.net](mailto:wcbenish@verizon.net).** Thank you. - Bill

**Hillandale Walk – Tuesday, December 21** - The December Hillandale walk will be during the last morning of fall with winter beginning that day after sunset. **Meet at 9:00 AM at the playground parking lot.**

**Bird Club Book Club - Maureen Gallagher-McLeod**

The BCBC will not meet in December. Our next gathering at the home of Elizabeth Ihle will be on **Thursday, January 20, 2011 at 6:00 PM**. We will discuss the book *Wilderness Warrior* by Douglas Brinkley. **If you are interested in joining this discussion about Teddy Roosevelt, contact Maureen at [famcleod@earthlink.net](mailto:famcleod@earthlink.net) or 896-9541.**

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**Trip Reports**

**Northern Saw-whet Owl Trip to Highland Retreat - November 1** - It was a cold, dark night for six RBC members and friends but certainly it was NOT dreary, with six Northern Saw-whet Owls dropping in, and host Clair Mellinger letting us experience the banding/research process as he shared his knowledge of this intriguing species. Hiking up the ridge to the “tune” of a constantly repeated Saw-whet Owl call, our first hourly net-check yielded one owl, followed an hour later by five more. Patiently answering questions and describing the process in detail, Clair led us through weighing, measuring, sexing, aging, and even evaluating the eye color of the owls.

Clair’s recent club presentation gave us a wonderful look at the banding project. Still, I think everyone on the trip agreed that there was simply no describing the awe of experiencing these critters in person. Along with giving us close looks at owl’s ears and even the back of the eye (really!), the “crowd pleaser” seemed to be the “head-turning” demo – the bird, held perched and upright, stayed focused on Clair with head remaining still as Clair gently rotated its “perch” side-to-side, seemingly well beyond a half-circle span. Lots of “oohs and aahs,” were uttered, and cameras steadily clicked away!

Finally, under the careful tutelage of Clair, everyone had a chance to hold a bird before we released them safely outdoors, gently placing them on nearby picnic tables. Most stayed still a brief while, seeming to regain their composure before flying off. Many thanks to Clair; this trip was a quite a treat!- **Diane Lepkowski**

**November Hillendale Walk** - On 19 November eight members of the Rockingham Bird Club enjoyed a beautiful morning walk at Hillendale Park. Before leaving the parking lot we discussed our wishes for bird sightings for the morning. Since there was keen interest to find out if the October Loggerhead Shrike was still present we immediately set out on the south loop of the trail. We proceeded to the golf course boundary fence and as we peered across the golf course the shrike was spotted. Success! Its cotton colored breast captured the sun quite brilliantly as it moved back and forth from the tops of trees to brush in contrast to the blue sky and green fairways. It was quite distant, requiring us to steady our glasses, and most of the group was able view it. For those that didn't get to see it we will search it out again in December.

Other birds from our morning wish list such as Bald Eagle, Brown Thrasher and kinglets did not cooperate, so we save them for another day. During the remainder of the walk we conversed with dozens of Blue Jays and Robins for much of the entire walk. Other species included Northern Flicker, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and White-breasted Nuthatch. White-throated Sparrows caught our attention as they posed motionless in and around the cedar trees as if they sensed us looking at them. A Red-tailed Hawk made brief appearances and demonstrated a habit of flying directly away

from the birding group on those occasions. Dark-eyed Juncos, Tufted Titmice and Carolina Chickadees rounded out the smaller birds. Near the end of the walk our appetites became obvious as we all stopped to sample the persimmons from the heavily fruited tree near the northwest shelter. By now the group began to disband. Those that remained hoping for a second look at the shrike managed one more species for the morning as a Turkey Vulture soared overhead as the walk concluded. During our walk we encountered 19 species. Hope to see you in December. – **Tom Mizell**

**Lake Shenandoah Trip** - Five RBC members and one guest enjoyed a gorgeous morning at Lake Shenandoah on November 20. Waterfowl have been late coming this year, but we were treated to a nice group of 13 handsome Buffleheads. Other waterfowl included Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, the usual Mallards and a flock of 25-30 American Coots.

Other highlights included Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Cedar Waxwing, White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows and Red-tailed, Sharp-shinned, and Cooper's Hawks. - **Greg Moyers**

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### **Bird Sightings – Ken Hinkle**

There have been at least three rarities reported around the county during November. A Rufous Hummingbird was coming to a feeder at Josie Showalter's place in Hinton at the first of the month. Harold and Grace Jones found a Snow Bunting at the top of Reddish Knob on November 13. The Aigners also saw and photographed the bunting. Finally, Diane Holsinger saw an American Bittern at a pond three miles north of Timberville on November 15. Diane said the pond had no vegetation around it giving her good views of the bittern's big green legs as it stalked around the edge. So far as I know, these are the first reports for either a Snow Bunting or an American Bittern in the county since the 1990s.

Harold and Grace also saw a Red-shouldered Hawk on a farm in the Madison Run area. Other local sightings by Diane have included a Northern Harrier, Tundra Swan, a Winter Wren in her yard (a first) and a Belted Kingfisher "beating the heck" out of a fish.

Back on November 6 Diane Lepkowski found Buffleheads, a Ruddy Duck and a Ring-necked Duck on Lake Shenandoah. Hooded Mergansers, Buffleheads and Ruddy Ducks along with a few Northern Shovelers have been among recent sightings at Silver Lake.

Greg Moyers saw an American Pipit at the wetlands along Nazarene Church Road, and along Badger Road in Augusta County he saw an immature Red-headed Woodpecker and two adults. I am still seeing both an immature and an adult Red-headed Woodpecker regularly up my road. Several of us have been seeing Fox Sparrows, and there have been a few reports of Pine Siskins visiting feeders.

Orv Lehman has had Rusty Blackbirds, Cedar Waxwings, Purple Finches, White-crowned Sparrows and an Eastern Towhee at his place near Linville. Bill Benish has also reported Purple Finches. The latter species seem very sporadic. I had a few at my feeder about a month ago for a day or two. Since then I have only seen one female now and then. Some winters I have them early, and then not again until late winter. Other winters they have stayed around pretty consistently.

William Leigh reported seven Golden Eagles were observed at the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch during the first weekend of November, along with an immature Goshawk. More recently on November 21 William had a good morning at Natural Chimneys seeing Winter Wrens, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskins and a Brown Creeper. On the same trip William found 28 Horned Larks along nearby Timber Ridge Road, which has been very reliable for this species over the past several years..

Matt Gingerich has had several Black-capped Chickadees at his feeder at Keezletown. He said these Chickadees were significantly larger and more brightly patterned than the more common Carolina Chickadees that they usually have. Matt related that he has read that there seems to be significant increases in Black-capped Chickadee numbers across the northern states this fall.

While hiking the Appalachian Trail just south of Pocosin cabin on November 19, Mike Smith flushed a flock of about 20 Ravens along with an adult Bald Eagle. Mike thinks they may have been on a deer kill. Be sure to read Mike's exciting report that follows on his trip to Peru this past summer.

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### **Peru Trip – Mike Smith**

This past July, my son Joshua and I traveled to Peru. We toured Machu Picchu and the Amazonian rainforest. After a red-eye flight to Lima, the capital, we continued on to Cusco. This was the Incan capital before the Spanish Conquest. On the train ride to Machu Picchu, we saw a pair of Torrent Ducks along the Urubambo river. The beauty of Machu Picchu took our breath away. Five hundred year old ruins were balanced on steep hillsides, with the river far below. Snow covered mountains glistened in the distance. Blue and White Swallows were nesting in the rock walls that were expertly crafted many years ago. Next we headed overland across the Andes. The treeless Puno at the top had Black Siskins, Puna Ibis, and Andean Thrush. As we crossed over the Andes, we reached stunted trees called the Elfin Forest. Then we dropped down into Manu National Park. The size of Switzerland, Manu has some of the greatest biodiversity in the world. It has six uncontacted Stone Age tribes within its borders. As we lost elevation, the air became moister, and the tree ferns started appearing. We were now in the Cloud Rainforest. Here the birds showed up in a dazzling array of colors. We spied White-collared Jays, Paradise Tanager, and a Montaine Creeper. We also saw a Blue-crowned Motmot or “clock bird”, so called because it wags its tail. At the Cock of the Rock lodge, we saw several Cock of the Rocks from a blind promptly at 6:00 AM. Also at the lodge feeders was a Booted Raquetail (hummingbird). A troop of capuchin monkeys descended on us, looking for a handout. We left the rainforest and headed to a boat which took us on the Alto Madre de Dios River. This is a tributary of the Amazon River. Our destination was the Pantiacolla Lodge. Along the river we saw Squirrel Cuckoo, Yellow-rumped Cacique and striated Tiger Heron. Other sightings included Crested Eagle, Hoatzins, and King Vultures feeding on a dead capybara. Perched on a rock was seen an endangered black caiman (crocodile species). Two people had disappeared at the lodge recently. An anaconda was suspected. Birds that we spotted here were Blue-throated Piping Guan and Sand-colored Nighthawks. On the trail we saw inch long bullet ants which have a nasty bite. Fork-tailed Swifts zoomed overhead. Back on the Alto de Dios River, we saw a flock of 30 Plumbeous Kites soaring over the jungle. Also we saw Red-faced Caracaras and Horned Screamers, the second largest bird in South America. At Manu Wildlife Center we went to the Blanquillo Macaw clay lick. There, from a blind, we saw hundreds of Blue-headed Parrots followed by 50 larger Green-winged Macaws. They eat the clay which neutralizes the poisons in their diet. At the Manu Wildlife Center, I saw a Reddish Hermit (hummingbird). On the jungle trail, we saw fresh jaguar tracks, a reddish tarantula and a black scorpion. At a blind we were lucky to see

wild Brazilian tapirs eating the mud. That night I heard the startling cry of the Great Potoo from our cabin. The next day we traveled to an oxbow lake. There we were treated to a family of endangered giant river otters. Also there were Lineated Woodpecker, Agami Heron, Amazonian Kingfisher, Yellow-headed Vulture, and Swallow-tailed Kite overhead. Orinoco Geese were spotted on the river. Back at the lodge, we had a black spider monkey troop passing through the jungle canopy. Along the trail we heard the very loud screaming Peha. At night we could hear the Tropical Screech Owl and howler monkey chorus (more like a roar) in the distant jungle. We passed by huge ceiba trees and strangler figs in the primary forest. It was a trip we will never forget.

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The Rockingham Bird Club extends deepest sympathy to the family of Dr. Hollen Helbert who passed away on November 16. Dr. Helbert was a longtime member of the RBC.

**PRESIDENT: Kay Gibson**  
14784 S. Eastside Highway  
Grottoes, VA 22441  
Phone - 249-5287  
ceramickay1@verizon.net

**VICE PRESIDENT: PROGRAMS – Elizabeth Ihle – 234-8296**

**VICE PRESIDENT: FIELD TRIPS – Diane Lepkowski – 908-7662**

**SECRETARY: Phyllis Showalter - 433-0391**

**TREASURER: Steve White – 833-6726**

**MEMBERS AT LARGE: Tom Mizell – 828-6059 & Bill Benish - 908-7336**

**GOLDFINCH GAZETTE - Ken Hinkle**  
540-828-3782      kencora@verizon.net