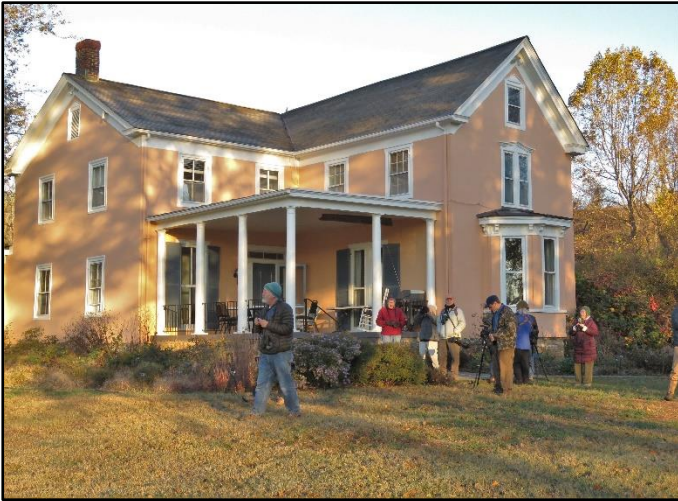


## CLIFTON INSTITUTE BIRD OUTING

**CLIFTON INSTITUTE:** Our mission is to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards, to learn about the ecology of the northern Virginia Piedmont, and to conserve native biodiversity. We accomplish our mission by providing environmental education, conducting ecological research, and restoring habitat for native plants and animals. Our 900-acre field station, which includes forests, grasslands, shrub fields, and wetlands, provides a beautiful and easily accessible location for all our programs and is permanently protected under a conservation easement.



*Fredericksburg Birding Club gathering at the Clifton house.  
Photo by T. Stamps*

grass interspersed with trees and surrounded by woodlands. Here we hit the woodpecker jackpot, seeing Pileated, Hairy, and Downy Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, hearing Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and watching 3 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers working some sycamore trees together. Bert heard a winter wren which failed to show itself, but everybody got good looks at 2 Hermit Thrushes feeding on oriental bittersweet. Unfortunately, Institute personnel are trying to combat the spread of this invasive, non-native plant, and are not aided by birds spreading the seeds.

November 2, 2019

by Maureen Daly-Hamm and Tim Stamps

We arrived at the Clifton Institute to a perfect late fall day: a crisp first frost, sunny, no wind and some leaves still on the trees. After bundling up for the unaccustomed cold, the 12 of us gathered around the 1817 farmhouse, reconnecting with those we hadn't seen in a while, taking in the nearby birds, and watching a beaver slowly swim across the pond. The day continued with notable sightings of raptors, sparrows, and woodpeckers among others, fascinating views of non-avian wildlife behavior, and some insights into the research and restoration activities going on at Clifton.

Bert Harris, co-director of Clifton, led our group through a variety of habitats on the 900-acre property. We started our tour shortly after 8 AM, walking mowed paths through an area of brush and tall



*Sapsuckers in sycamore. Photo by Jeff Pozner*



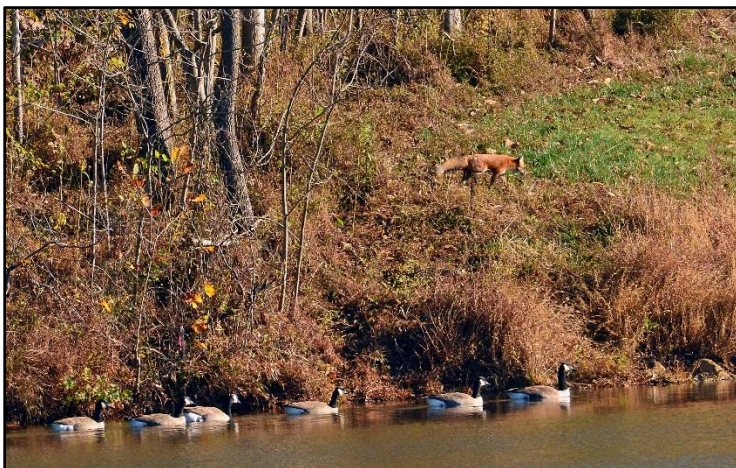
*Ring-necked ducks. Photo by T. Stamps*

From the brushy woodlands, we walked down the hill past the farmhouse to the levee and upper pond. After encountering several Ruby-crowned Kinglets, 4 Northern Flickers foraging in the mowed grass, and a handful of Song Sparrows, we saw a Red Fox walking a path on the far side of the pond. We were able to watch it for several minutes while it actively hunted the tall grass until it disappeared up a forest trail. Looking from the levee to the lower pond, we had good views of 25 Canada Geese, a raft of 12 Ring-necked Ducks, 3 Black Ducks, a Mallard, and 3 American Wigeon.

As we meandered to the second pond another Red Fox appeared along the far side near the ducks and geese! He eyed the ducks and came quite close to them as he walked along the edge of the water, but aside from the Black Ducks rafting up a bit, the waterfowl seemed to take little notice. Moments later, a Bald Eagle flyover got the ducks on the wing. In the meantime, 2 White-tailed Deer came over the ridge and down to the edge of the pond where the fox again showed up. Once the deer noticed



*Drake American Wigeon. Photo by Jeff Pozner.*



*Canada geese and Red Fox. Photo by Jeff Pozner.*

him, one deer took off, but the other just hung around and the fox moved on to other hunting grounds, as did we.

Our group continued across the levee to the cattle pasture where Clifton is in the process of returning half, about 100 acres, to native grass meadows. The remaining pasture is leased to a farmer for cattle grazing and pasture rotation will be instituted next year. We stayed in the restored grass



## CLIFTON INSTITUTE BIRD OUTING

meadow where we saw most of our raptors of the day. Our first sighting was of an American Kestrel headed to a tree limb with mouse in talons, followed closely by 2 more kestrels flying together. Bert told us they had put up several kestrel nesting boxes this year and two were promptly occupied by pairs. The two pairs each successfully raised 5 offspring which the Institute staff leg banded. Clifton plans to study kestrel hunting habits, comparing the use of tall grass meadow with agricultural fields. Three Bald Eagles, a first year, a third year, and an adult were seen perched in distant trees nearer to the cattle and later flew over. The tall grass meadow supported numerous Savannah Sparrows that were easier heard than seen, and a juvenal White Crowned Sparrow. Joyce Bathke picked out an Eastern Meadowlark on the far grassy horizon near grazing land.



*Eagle flyover. Photo by Jim Goehring*



*Savannah Sparrow. Photo by Jim Goehring*

As we headed back to the farmhouse towards noon, a Northern Harrier glided into view putting on a good show as she hunted the restored meadow. It was a great end to our delightful full morning of birding after which we sat on the porch of the farmhouse to eat lunch and tally our birds in the warm sunshine. We saw/heard a total of 50 species for the day.



*Northern Harrier hunting for a meal. Photo by Jeff Pozner.*

## CLIFTON INSTITUTE BIRD OUTING



### PARTICIPANTS:

Sally Knight  
Linda Chaney  
Sara Lawrey  
Mark Miller  
Georgia Patton  
Jim Goehring  
Joyce and Mike Bathke  
Joan and Jeff Pozner  
Maureen Daly-Hamm  
Tim Stamps

*Overgrown pastureland: excellent for sparrows and raptors.  
Photo by T. Stamps*

### Birds Seen or Heard (50 species)

Canada Goose	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
American Wigeon	Carolina Wren
Mallard	Winter Wren (heard only)
American Black Duck	Brown Thrasher
Ring-necked Duck	Northern Mockingbird
Turkey Vulture	European Starling
Black Vulture	Eastern Bluebird
Northern Harrier	Hermit Thrush
Bald Eagle	American Robin
Red-tailed Hawk	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Belted Kingfisher	Cedar Waxwing
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Chipping Sparrow
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Dark-eyed Junco
Downy Woodpecker	Field Sparrow
Hairy Woodpecker	White-crowned Sparrow
Pileated Woodpecker	White-throated Sparrow
Northern Flicker	Savannah Sparrow
American Kestrel	Song Sparrow
Eastern Phoebe	Swamp Sparrow
Blue Jay	Eastern Towhee
American Crow	Eastern Meadowlark
Fish Crow	Northern Cardinal
Common Raven	Common Grackle
Carolina Chickadee	American Goldfinch
Tufted Titmouse	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	