

Birding the Balsams

June 21, 2020

This was my first day trip in the Covid age. I was really excited to get out and bird with other people again. We all wore masks and tried to keep at least six feet apart at all times. The weather for the day was perfect, sunny with mixed clouds at times. We had 9 participants and myself as we let the elevation of the Blue Ridge Parkway tell us the story of birdlife in the area. We started the day at the Folk Art Center on the Blue Ridge Parkway. I always enjoy walking the parking lot early in the morning to see what turns up. We had PINE WARBLER, CEDAR WAXWING, and the always popular EASTERN BLUEBIRDS on our walk. After the quick walk around the parking lot we headed South on the Parkway towards our next stop.

We arrived early at the Mills River Overlook. A few CHIMNEY SWIFTS buzzed overhead. Our first good looks at CANADA WARBLER came early, we heard a CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER, and had a good look at a ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK. The highlight of the stop was three fledgling DARK-EYED JUNCOS hopping around on the ground. Everyone got great looks. It was hard not to like those cute little Juncos. The next stop on the trip was to the pull off just before the Pisgah Inn. This is a great place to stretch your legs on the trail to the campground. The first bird we saw was a BROWN THRASHER. A short walk on the trail produced our first great looks at CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER, BLUE-HEADED VIREO, and a heard RAVEN.

It was still early and I wanted to beat the crowds up to Black Balsam so that was our next stop. The parking area was fairly full, but there was enough room for us up there. We heard the resident CEDAR WAXWINGS right away. A HOUSE WREN, COMMON YELLOWTHROATS, and CANADA WARBLERS were singing in the parking lot. We meandered out to the field and heard our first LEAST FLYCATCHERS. We also had a pair of BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES singing their two note songs. EASTERN TOWHEES were thick around the trail and parking area, and we heard a couple VEERY doing their slurry spiraling song.

After a couple hours walk around we decided to meander up the road to have lunch near the Devil's Courthouse. We had lunch at a secluded pull off amongst BROAD-WINGED HAWKS, GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLETS, and a RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH. After lunch we stopped at the Devil's Courthouse and were rewarded with a cooperative PEREGRINE FALCON. Having not had great looks at ALDER FLYCATCHER some of us decided to go back to the Black Balsam parking area and try to see if we could get it a look at this bird. We ended up finding the ALDER FLYCATCHER near the parking area and had very satisfying views of the bird. We also watch four RAVENS dance around the sky. One even went into a Spruce stand and came out with a chick that it robbed from a nest.

We ended up with 50 species on the day and many satisfying looks at target birds. I highly recommend birding at high elevations this time of year. The birds are great and the weather is more than tolerable. Please join us on our next adventure into the high elevations.

Kevin Burke

Birds Seen or Heard 50 Species

Chimney Swift	Black-capped Chickadee	Dark-eyed Junco
Turkey Vulture	Tufted Titmouse	Song Sparrow
Broad-winged Hawk	White-breasted Nuthatch	Eastern Towhee
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Brown-headed Cowbird
Pileated Woodpecker	House Wren	Common Yellowthroat
Downy Woodpecker	Carolina Wren	Pine Warbler
Peregrine Falcon	Winter Wren	Ovenbird
Eastern Phoebe	Gray Catbird	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Alder Flycatcher	Brown Thrasher	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Least Flycatcher	Wood Thrush	Black-throated Green
Red-eyed Vireo	Veery	Warbler
Blue-headed Vireo	American Robin	Hooded Warbler
Golden-crowned Kinglet	Eastern Bluebird	Canada Warbler
Blue Jay	Cedar Waxwing	Northern Cardinal
American Crow	American Goldfinch	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Common Raven	Field Sparrow	Indigo Bunting
Carolina Chickadee	Chipping Sparrow	