

Rarity Round-Up: Kite Watch
August 22, 2020

Trip Report

This August's edition of our Rarity Round-Up trip was focused specifically on finding both Mississippi and Swallow-tailed Kites in WNC, in addition to whatever other rarities we could find. At this time of year, it always pays to check Hooper Lane, and we made it our first stop of the day. Yesterday's rain had left quite a few puddles about and on the first scan we found plenty of Killdeer and good numbers of Pectoral Sandpipers. An early **Wilson's Snipe** which turned up nearly 2 weeks prior was joined today by a 2nd, and we got great scope views of these chunky, long-billed shorebirds. Another scan revealed a couple of Semipalmated Sandpipers, and as we were checking them out, two Great Egrets flew in. A little farther down the road, we had our 2nd rarity in as many minutes – two juvenile **White Ibis** feeding with crows in the sod! At Mills River Park, the songs of counter-singing Blue Grosbeaks greeted us as we stepped from the car and we quickly found one perched atop a tall cherry tree. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds buzzed through the grassy edges visiting jewelweed blooms, and as we stopped to admire one, an unexpected song grabbed our attention – that of a **Marsh Wren**! After some effort we finally got great looks at this rare-but-annual migrant as it preened and softly sang from its low perch. Common Yellowthroat, Yellow Warbler, Orchard Oriole, Indigo Bunting, and Eastern Meadowlark rounded out the next few minutes. Our excellent fortune continued when not one but two **Mississippi Kites** soared into view over the park, followed soon thereafter by a beautiful **Swallow-tailed Kite**. Success – and all before 10 AM!

A quick visit back to the sod farm turned up great views another rarity, the previously reported **Baird's Sandpiper**, a long-distance migrant on its way to South America. A few further stops in the Mills River area yielded more looks at soaring Mississippi Kites plus other raptors like Broad-winged Hawk and Osprey. We had our lunch at Berkeley Park in Hendersonville, where we found Brown-headed Nuthatch, Hooded Warbler, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. For our last stop of the day, we decided to try for the Red Crossbills reported at Guion Farm in DuPont State Forest. Despite all the mountain biker and hiker traffic, we soon heard one singing from the top of a pine just a few minutes down the trail. Getting a look from within the forest was proving impossible however, so we pressed on to a clearing. After about 15 minutes of waiting, we at last got decent looks of a singing male perched in a dead pine. While they certainly aren't rare in our area, Red Crossbills can be really tough to get good views of, so to have that be our last bird of the day was pretty special!

We finished this super fun tour with a whopping 65 species, including 6 rarities. Not bad for a day in late August!

Aaron Steed

Species Encountered (rarities*) – 65 total

Canada Goose	Red-shouldered Hawk	European Starling
Mallard	Broad-winged Hawk	Gray Catbird
Mourning Dove	Red-tailed Hawk	Brown Thrasher
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Belted Kingfisher	Northern Mockingbird
Chimney Swift	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Eastern Bluebird
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Downy Woodpecker	American Robin
Killdeer	Pileated Woodpecker	House Finch
Least Sandpiper	Northern Flicker	Red Crossbill
Pectoral Sandpiper	Eastern Wood-Pewee	American Goldfinch
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Eastern Phoebe	Field Sparrow
Baird's Sandpiper	Eastern Kingbird	Song Sparrow
Wilson's Snipe	Blue Jay	Eastern Towhee
Great Blue Heron	American Crow	Eastern Meadowlark
Great Egret	Fish Crow	Orchard Oriole
Green Heron	Carolina Chickadee	Red-winged Blackbird
White Ibis	Tufted Titmouse	Common Yellowthroat
Black Vulture	Barn Swallow	Hooded Warbler
Turkey Vulture	White-breasted Nuthatch	Yellow Warbler
Osprey	Brown-headed Nuthatch	Northern Cardinal
Mississippi Kite	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Blue Grosbeak
Swallow-tailed Kite	Carolina Wren	Indigo Bunting
Cooper's Hawk	Marsh Wren	