

Transylvania County High Elevations June 30, 2020

After meeting at 7:00 a.m. at the entrance to Pisgah National Forest on Highway 276 we zipped up the road to the Art Loeb Trailhead to pick up a few birds that we'd likely miss at higher elevations. As soon as the engines were turned off a Swainson's Warbler could be heard singing. A short walk down the trail and a little patience produced great views of this notoriously skulky warbler. Northern Parulas, a Yellow-throated Warbler and Acadian Flycatchers were also singing—all birds that would become less likely as we would head up in elevation towards the Blue Ridge Parkway. A great start!

We made a brief stop at Pink Beds. Other than Hooded Warblers and a Red-shouldered Hawk this usually bustling spot was rather quiet. We didn't spend too much time here as we still had lots of ground to cover. We decided the best course of action would be to rush to the farthest point and work our way back down. Onward to Black Balsam Knob.

We had Black Balsam to ourselves. It was overcast and still. A singing House Wren juxtaposed nicely against a singing Winter Wren. Our number one target here proved a little trickier though. The Alder Flycatchers were not singing. We walked down Sam Knob Trail and heard the chip note of an Alder Flycatcher. We only managed a quick look. Then we doubled back around and had another brief look at an Alder and a few chip notes. There were clearly a few up there but they weren't too cooperative today. After a solid hour and a handful of quick glimpses we decided to move on down.

We went down Black Balsam Road and found a pulloff large enough for our separate cars. We had great looks at Chestnut-sided and Canada Warblers. Then a little farther up the road a singing Black-capped Chickadee was a welcome surprise. In response to my whistles a Northern Saw-whet Owl called a few times.

Moving on, we took the Parkway back north pulling off at most overlooks and adding birds as we went. The ethereal song of the Veery was common and every overlook hosted, at least, a pair of Chestnut-sided Warblers.

As a result of Covid-19 the Mount Pisgah Campground was closed to camping. Offering a great place for a picnic while being serenaded by Veeries and Least Flycatchers. We borrowed a picnic table and had the entire campground to ourselves. A wonderful experience we may not have the opportunity to repeat.

After lunch and a walk around the campground we went down to Pisgah Parking area and walked to Buck Spring Lodge. Though birds were quieting down we enjoyed watching four calling, soaring Broad-winged Hawks. It was a fine way to end a great day.

All told we managed just under fifty species for the day. Highlights being the saw-whet owl, black-capped chickadee, Swainson's warbler and least and Alder Flycatchers. Traffic on the Parkway was uncharacteristically light, it was cool and calm, there were loads of birds and the company was great. A fun day of birding!

Michael Plauché

Birds seen or heard

Mourning Dove
Chimney Swift
Red-shouldered Hawk
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Northern Saw-whet Owl
(Heard)
Eastern Phoebe
Acadian Flycatcher
Least Flycatcher
Alder Flycatcher
Red-eyed Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Blue Jay
American Crow
Common Raven

Carolina Chickadee
Black-capped Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Red-breasted Nuthatch
House Wren
Carolina Wren
Winter Wren
Gray Catbird
Veery
Hermit Thrush
American Robin
Cedar Waxwing
American Goldfinch
Chipping Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Song Sparrow
Eastern Towhee

Common Yellowthroat
Northern Parula
Swainson's Warbler
Yellow-throated Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
Blackburnian Warbler
Ovenbird
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Black-throated Blue Warbler
Black-throated Green
Warbler
Hooded Warbler
Canada Warbler
Scarlet Tanager
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting