

Birding the Balsams

July 14, 2020

The eight of us met at the entrance to Pisgah National Forest in Brevard. The forecast was for a hot summer day. A great day to head into the cool forest and up in elevation! As per social distancing guidelines we all got in our own cars and headed through the forest directly to the Parkway.

Our first stop, the Wagon Road Gap Overlook, was rather quiet to start besides the ethereal song of a Veery in the distance. A mixed flock of Blue-headed Vireo, Tufted Titmice and a Downy Woodpecker drew us down the road where we flushed a roadside Ruffed Grouse across the road and into the woods. After a lull in activity we moved on.

At our next stop, Pounding Mill Overlook, a few Ruby-throated Hummingbirds quickly buzzed over us. One perched in an oak allowing for a good study. A young Black-and-white Warbler and a Scarlet Tanager were nice birds at this stop.

A quick stop at Graveyard Fields provided clean restrooms and a few Common Yellowthroats, Black-throated Green Warblers and Chestnut-sided Warblers.

At Black Balsam Knob we walked along a mountain meadow trail where a number of Alder Flycatchers were singing and giving occasional quick glances. The beautiful song of a Hermit Thrush echoed from downslope. We crossed paths with a singing Black-capped Chickadee. Then we ended up in the middle of a family of Canada Warblers up close and personal. The young inquisitive birds came in to inspect us while the adults chipped and fluttered a little further back. Surely these ground nesters had set up right beside the trail. I'm afraid we walked right into their living room! We walked out to a high bald that was stunningly beautiful and marvelously quiet except for the singing of Yellowthroats and a distant Alder Flycatcher. After taking it in, we decided not to commit to any more hiking and headed back through the family of Canada Warblers and to our cars to move on to Devil's Courthouse.

At Devil's Courthouse Golden-crowned Kinglets were active all along the trail. We had a brief look at a Veery just trail side and got to listen to Veeries and Hermit Thrushes singing at the same time, comparing the two similar but distinctly different birdsongs. Each among the most beautiful, in my opinion.

You truly never know what you'll get on the Blue Ridge Parkway (other than spectacular scenery.) While warblers were quiet and somewhat hard to come by the thrushes, alder flycatchers and nearly constant buzz of hummingbirds made for a fine morning of high elevation birding.

Michael Plauché

Birds we saw or heard Species encountered: 33

Ruffed Grouse	Tufted Titmouse	Dark-eyed Junco
Chimney Swift	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Song Sparrow
Ruby-throated	Brown Creeper	Eastern Towhee
Hummingbird	House Wren	Common Yellowthroat
Turkey Vulture	Carolina Wren	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Downy Woodpecker	Winter Wren	Black-and-white Warbler
Alder Flycatcher	Gray Catbird	Black-throated Green
Red-eyed Vireo	Hermit Thrush	Warbler
Blue-headed Vireo	Veery	Canada Warbler
Golden-crowned Kinglet	American Robin	Scarlet Tanager
Common Raven	Cedar Waxwing	Indigo Bunting
Black-capped Chickadee	American Goldfinch	