

'Spectacular Fall Migration'
Ridge Junction Overlook, Yancey/Buncombe Counties
August 30, 2020

Trip Report

Our first tour of fall 2020 to the famed migration hotspot Ridge Junction began with clear viewing conditions and a spectacular sunrise. It was however a bit windy (a few of us lost our hats once or twice) and the overlook was mostly quiet for the first few minutes. A quick flyby BROAD-WINGED HAWK and a few flyover CEDAR WAXWINGS got things started. Thankfully, we didn't have to wait long for warblers to start dropping in. At first we heard a few flight calls overhead but many of them remained silhouetted specks just continuing through the gap. A short walk up the road to Mt. Mitchell ended up being the ticket and resulted in our first good views of an assortment of warblers dropping in on either side of the road. The first wave was mostly BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLERS, both males and females showing well. Soon we were seeing plenty of both BLACK-THROATED GREEN and TENNESSEE WARBLERS, with good numbers of BLACKBURNIAN mixed in. Every once in a while, we'd pick out something different, like a BLACK-AND-WHITE or CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER, or NORTHERN PARULA. We found one beautiful male CAPE MAY WARBLER and before we knew it, we were finding them by the dozen as they landed briefly in the tall spruces before continuing across the road. A CANADA WARBLER sang from a low perch and gave us brief views while BLUE-HEADED VIREOS sang and chattered away. There were plenty of RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRDS and BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHERS, and no shortage of GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLETS or RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES. A single SCARLET TANAGER made an appearance next to a waxwing in the top of a spruce and we heard a few squeaks from an obscured ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK. A surprise was a high-flying GREAT BLUE HERON – a Ridge Junction first for this guide! Thrushes were completely absent and our only woodpecker of the day was a heard HAIRY – but the warbler traffic through the gap was fairly continuous until about 11:30 and just watching the birds move through in a frenzy was indeed spectacular at times. While overall diversity was a bit on the low side, it's always fun sorting through the warbler flocks amidst such spectacular mountain scenery. Today the flocks were predominately made up of Tennessee, Cape May, and Black-throated Green Warblers, but what will it be next time - and what other surprises might be in store?

Aaron Steed

Species Encountered (32 total)

Wild Turkey	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Blackburnian Warbler
Chimney Swift	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Ruby-throated	Carolina Wren	Black-throated Blue
Hummingbird	Cedar Waxwing	Warbler
Great Blue Heron	American Goldfinch	Black-throated Green
Broad-winged Hawk	Dark-eyed Junco	Warbler
Hairy Woodpecker	Eastern Towhee	Canada Warbler
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Black-and-white Warbler	Scarlet Tanager
Blue-headed Vireo	Tennessee Warbler	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Red-eyed Vireo	American Redstart	
Blue Jay	Cape May Warbler	
Common Raven	Northern Parula	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	Magnolia Warbler	