



North Carolina

Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

Central Blue Ridge Parkway

1 Historic Orchard at Altapass

Owner: The Altapass Foundation

1025 Orchard Road, off Blue Ridge Parkway Milepost 328.3
888-765-9531

Mitchell, McDowell Counties
www.altapassorchard.com

Site Description: All 144 acres of the Historic Orchard at Altapass are open for exploration to birders. Situated on a southeast-facing slope, mid-elevation woodland birds inhabit the area. Visit the Herb Garden to search for Indigo Bunting, Eastern Bluebird, Gray Catbird and a variety of other songbirds. From mid-August through October, mixed flocks of migrating songbirds are abundant. Common sightings along the Loops Overlook, above the Orchard on the Blue Ridge Parkway, include Cedar Waxwing, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, along with vireos, thrushes, cuckoos, and a variety of warblers. Pileated, Downy, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Northern Flicker are also common. The Orchard presents a variety of events and activities that celebrate the area's historical, natural, and cultural treasures. Enjoy the Monarch Butterfly program, live music, storytelling, and beautiful vistas for photography. The Overmountain Victory Celebration is held in September. Guided bird walks may be arranged.

Species of Interest: Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Kentucky Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Indigo Bunting, Scarlet Tanager

Habitats: northern hardwood/cove forest, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, floodplain forest, river/stream

Access & Parking: The site is open from mid-May to the end of October, from 10am to 6pm, Monday, Wednesday-Saturday; 12pm to 6pm on Sunday. Closed Tuesdays, except in October.

Directions: From Spruce Pine, take NC 226 south approximately 6 miles to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Travel north on the Parkway to Milepost 328.

Coordinates: N 35° 52' 43" W 82° 01' 28"

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2 Crabtree Meadows

Owner: Blue Ridge Parkway

Blue Ridge Parkway Mileposts 339
828-765-6082

Yancey County

www.nps.gov/blri

Site Description: The Crabtree Falls Trail is a moderate to strenuous 2.5-mile loop trail that traverses a variety of habitats. The Crabtree Meadows campground and the open field next to the amphitheater also offer good birding. Additional species may be found directly along the Parkway. The Three Knobs Overlook (Milepost 338.8), just north of the entrance to Crabtree Meadows, and the cut vista openings at the entrance offer views of raptors and early successional species. Great-crested, Least and Acadian Flycatchers, Scarlet Tanager, Black-billed and Yellow-Billed Cuckoos, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Brown Creeper, Louisiana Waterthrush, and many warblers, including Canada, Hooded, Black-throated Blue and Black-throated Green Warblers, can be found along the trail. Barred Owl frequent the area and can often be seen and heard during daylight hours. Red-headed Woodpecker and other woodpecker species have been seen in the campground. The open field next to the amphitheater is a good site for Field, Song and Chipping Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlark, Indigo Bunting and Common Yellowthroat.

Species of Interest: Common Raven, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Meadowlark, Least Flycatcher, Black-throated Green Warbler, Canada Warbler

Habitats: northern hardwood/cove forest, oak forest & mixed hardwood/pine, early successional, bog/wetlands

Special Concerns: Sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway are often closed during the winter months due to snow and ice. Other temporary closures may occur following storms as a result of hazardous road conditions. It is best to call ahead to get current road conditions (828-298-0398). The use of tapes to attract birds is prohibited.

Access & Parking: The trail is open daily, except during Parkway closures. Trailhead parking is behind the campground entrance kiosk. The store, campground and picnic area are open from May – October.

Directions: From Spruce Pine, take NC 226 south approximately 6 miles to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Turn right (south) on the Blue Ridge Parkway and go 8.5 miles to Crabtree Meadows (Milepost 339.5). Turn right and follow the signs into the campground.

Coordinates: N 35° 48' 44"

W 82° 08' 34"

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3 Ridge Junction Overlook

Owner: Blue Ridge Parkway

Blue Ridge Parkway Mileposts 355.5
828-765-6082

Buncombe, Yancey Counties www.nps.gov/blri

Site Description: Because of the unique formation of the surrounding mountain ridges, the Ridge Junction Overlook acts as a funnel during fall migration. On good days, literally thousands of birds can be observed moving through—although many are difficult to identify as they wing their way south. Some are more cooperative, though, and can be seen foraging in and around the low shrubbery on both sides of the overlook and near the intersection with NC 128. Watch for Blackburnian, Canada, Black-throated Blue and Black-throated Green Warblers, Red Crossbill and Pine Siskin.

Species of Interest: Common Raven, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Canada Warbler, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin

Habitats: spruce-fir forest, northern hardwood/cove forest, early successional, rocky outcrop

Special Concerns: Sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway are often closed during the winter months due to snow and ice. Other temporary closures may occur following storms as a result of hazardous road conditions. It is best to call ahead to get current road conditions (828-298-0398). The use of tapes to attract birds is prohibited.

Access & Parking: The site is open daily, except during Parkway closures. Parking is available at the overlook.

Directions: Access the Blue Ridge Parkway from one of the several access points in Asheville and head north toward Mount Mitchell, approximately 27 miles. Coming from the north, Ridge Junction Overlook is 11 miles south of the Parkway junction with NC 80, and 25 miles south of Spruce Pine.

Coordinates: N 35° 43' 02" W 82° 16' 43" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 32





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Central Blue Ridge Parkway

4 Mount Mitchell State Park

Owner: NC State Parks

2388 NC 128, Burnsville, NC 28714
828-675-4611

Yancey County

www.ncparks.gov

Site Description: Located within the Black Mountain Range, Mount Mitchell is the highest point east of the Mississippi River, standing at 6,684 feet. Visitors will discover another world as they venture through Mount Mitchell State Park's alpine forest, more similar to forests of the northern US and Canada than to the rest of North Carolina. Northern year-round residents, such as Cedar Waxwing, are also year-round residents here at Mount Mitchell State Park. The park includes more than 10 miles of trail, which lead along ridge lines and the spruce-fir ecosystem, offering breathtaking views of Pisgah National Forest. Several peaks located in and around the park exceed 6,000 feet in elevation. Near the summit, watch for birds of prey, including Peregrine Falcon and Sharp-shinned Hawk. A night in the campground, just below the summit, may reward you with the calls of a Northern Saw-whet or Barred Owl. Common Raven, Carolina Chickadee, and White-Breasted Nuthatch can be spotted in berry thickets around the restaurant, as well as on several of the trails that traverse the State Park.

Species of Interest: Peregrine Falcon, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Appalachian Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Black-capped Chickadee, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red Crossbill

Habitats: spruce-fir forest, northern hardwood/cove forest, rocky outcrop, river/stream

Access & Parking: The park is open from 8am to 6pm, November – February; 8am to 7pm, March, October; 8am to 8pm, April, September; 8am to 9pm, May – August. The visitor center is open daily from 8am to 5pm.

Directions: Mount Mitchell State Park is 33 miles north of Asheville, off the Blue Ridge Parkway at Milepost 355. Follow NC 128 2.5 miles to the park entrance.

Coordinates: N 35° 46' 00" W 82° 15' 53" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 32





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Black Mountains

Owner: Blue Ridge Parkway

Blue Ridge Parkway Mileposts 355-360
828-271-4779

Buncombe, Yancey Counties

www.nps.gov/blri

Site Description: The Black Mountains are the highest mountain range in the eastern US. The habitat and climate are well-suited for many species more typically found in Canada and the northern US. Red spruce and Fraser fir dominate the landscape, and wildflowers abound along the trails from May through September. From Balsam Gap, at Milepost 360 on the Blue Ridge Parkway, select from two fine trails: Big Butt and Mountains-to-Sea. Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Blue-headed Vireo, Veery, Hermit Thrush, Winter Wren, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Canada and Blackburnian Warblers are common on these trails from May through September. Flocks of Pine Siskin and Red Crossbill also occasionally stop to feed in the conifers. In April and May, listen for the drumming of Ruffed Grouse in the morning and the call of the Northern Saw-whet Owl in the evening. At the southernmost extension of its range, listen for singing Swainson's Thrush down-slope along the 5-mile section of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, from Balsam Gap to NC 128 in Mount Mitchell State Park. Balsam Gap can also be an excellent location for fall migrants in September and early October. Another interesting and similar trail to explore, the Bald Knob Ridge Trail, begins at Milepost 355 and ends about 1 mile west of the Parkway, on FR 472.

Species of Interest: Ruffed Grouse, Brown Creeper, Swainson's Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin

Habitats: spruce-fir forest, northern hardwood/cove forest, early successional

Special Concerns: Sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway are often closed during the winter months due to snow and ice. Other temporary closures may occur following storms as a result of hazardous road conditions. It is best to call ahead to get current road conditions (828-298-0398). The use of tapes to attract birds is prohibited.

Access & Parking: The site is open daily, except during Parkway closures. Parking is available at designated overlooks.

Directions: Access the Blue Ridge Parkway from one of the several access points in Asheville and head north to Milepost 360 at Balsam Gap Overlook.

Coordinates: N 35° 44' 04" W 82° 20' 39" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 32





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6 Craggy Gardens

Owner: Blue Ridge Parkway

Blue Ridge Parkway Mileposts 361-372
828-271-4779

Buncombe County

www.nps.gov/blri

Site Description: The mix of hardwood forest, mountain bald, and spruce/fir forest along this section of the Blue Ridge Parkway is home to a variety of breeding songbirds from May through September. At Milepost 367.6 turn onto the road leading to the Craggy Gardens picnic area. Walk along the road from the Parkway to the roundabout and watch for Veery, Winter Wren, Blue-headed Vireo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, and Canada Warblers. In fall, this road is usually a great place to see migrating songbirds such as Cape May, Tennessee, Bay-breasted, and Palm Warblers. At the roundabout, follow the Mountains-to-Sea Trail or the trail to Snowball Mountain and watch for Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, and Common Raven. Continue driving north on the Blue Ridge Parkway to the Craggy Visitor Center at Milepost 364.5. From the Visitor Center, follow the Craggy Gardens Trail through the heath bald to the Craggy Gardens picnic area. Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Blue and Canada Warblers are all common. Veery and Hermit Thrush can also be heard along the trail. Watch for Broad-winged Hawk and Common Raven overhead. During the fall migration, Sharp-shinned Hawk can be seen hunting for songbirds.

Species of Interest: Common Raven, Brown Creeper, Black-throated Green Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Canada Warbler

Habitats: spruce-fir forest, northern hardwood/cove forest, early successional, mountain heath bald

Special Concerns: Sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway are often closed during the winter months due to snow and ice. Other temporary closures may occur following storms as a result of hazardous road conditions. It is best to call ahead to get current road conditions (828-298-0398). The use of tapes to attract birds is prohibited.

Access & Parking: The site is open daily, except during Parkway closures. Parking is available at designated overlooks. The Craggy Visitor Center opens in mid-to-late April, from 10am to 4pm (with port-a-johns); 9am to 5pm, May - October (with restrooms).

Directions: Access the Blue Ridge Parkway from one of the several access points in Asheville and head north approximately 18 miles to the Craggy Gardens Picnic Area (Milepost 367.6) or the Craggy Gardens Visitor Center (Milepost 364.5).

Coordinates: N 35° 41' 53"

W 82° 23' 55"

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7 Bull Creek

Owner: Blue Ridge Parkway

Blue Ridge Parkway Mileposts 372-377.3
828-271-4779

Buncombe County

www.nps.gov/blri

Site Description: This section of the Blue Ridge Parkway is one of the best mid-elevation places to bird near Asheville. During the breeding season, birders can easily find many species of songbirds along this corridor. As spring progresses, though, traffic and noise picks up, so arrive early in the day for a pleasant birding experience. Tanbark Ridge (Milepost 376.7), Bull Creek Valley (Milepost 373.8), and Lane Pinnacle (Milepost 372.1) Overlooks are the safest places to park and bird, and all allow eye-level birding. Other vistas are accessible on foot, and provide equally good views at canopy species such as Cerulean and Blackburnian Warblers, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Scarlet Tanager. The Mountains-to-Sea (MTS) Trail that parallels the Parkway from Craven Gap (Milepost 377.4) to north of the Weaverville exit (Milepost 375.5) offers a more intimate experience. It can be accessed at Craven Gap and from Ox Creek Road (SR 2109), about 200 yards off of the Weaverville exit (though the latter access is poorly signed). If you follow the trail 2.2 miles north of Ox Creek Road, you'll come to the historic location of Rattle Snake Lodge, a haven for Black-throated Blue Warbler. Either of these two segments of the MTS Trail can be walked as a loop, returning to your car via the Parkway.

Species of Interest: Blue-headed Vireo, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Habitats: northern hardwood/cove forest, oak forest & mixed hardwood/pine

Special Concerns: Sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway are often closed during the winter months due to snow and ice. Other temporary closures may occur following storms as a result of hazardous road conditions. It is best to call ahead to get current road conditions (828-298-0398). The use of tapes to attract birds is prohibited.

Access & Parking: The site is open daily, except during Parkway closures. Parking is available at designated overlooks.

Directions: Access the Blue Ridge Parkway from one of the several access points in Asheville and head north to Milepost 377.

Coordinates: N 35° 38' 53"

W 82° 29' 27"

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8 Charles D. Owen Park

Owner: Buncombe County Parks, Greenways and Recreation Services

875 Warren Wilson Road, Swannanoa, NC 28778
828-250-4260

Buncombe County

www.buncombecounty.org

Site Description: Located within view of the Craggy Mountains, the main features of the park are the two lakes bordered by the Swannanoa River and Bee Tree Creek. Walk the 1-mile “figure-eight” path around the lakes. In winter, the lakes attract Pied-billed Grebe, Ring-necked Duck, Wood Duck and Bufflehead, among others. During nesting season, scan the sycamore trees and lakeside vegetation for Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Eastern Kingbird, Yellow Warbler and Warbling Vireo. Many warblers can also be seen during the spring migration season, including Palm, Chestnut-sided and Yellow-rumped Warblers, winging their way north and to higher elevations. Also look for Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers along the river and lake edges. The best sighting areas are along the paths between the river and lakes. In the mornings and afternoons during spring and summer, there are many Barn, Rough-winged and Tree Swallows feeding over the water's surface. The park is also great for woodpeckers, including Pileated, Red-bellied, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Northern Flicker and, in winter, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. In the late summer, when the birding gets slow, there are plenty of wildflowers to attract butterflies. The lakes are lined with cattails, rushes and sedges that become great habitat for several dragonfly and damselfly species. In the fall, Virginia creeper and poison ivy bring Swainson's Thrush, Rose-Breasted Grosbeak, and the returning warblers.

Species of Interest: Spotted Sandpiper, Orchard Oriole, Swainson's Thrush, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, wintering waterfowl

Habitats: oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, floodplain forest, early successional, river/lake/wetland

Access & Parking: The park is open daily during daylight hours. Ample parking is available throughout the park. Avoid parking near the ball fields during ball season.

Directions: From Asheville, take I-40 east to Exit 55. At the end of the ramp, turn left and travel to US 70 East. Turn right on US 70 East and travel 1.7 miles. Turn left on Warren Wilson College Road and travel 2.5 miles to the park entrance on the right.

Coordinates: N 35° 36' 36" W 82° 25' 46"

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