



North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Central Foothills

#### 1 Inn on Mill Creek

**Owner: David and Brigette Walters**

3895 Mill Creek Road, Old Fort, NC 28762  
828 668 1115

McDowell County

[www.innonmillcreek.com](http://www.innonmillcreek.com)

**Site Description:** Surrounded by the Pisgah National Forest, the Inn on Mill Creek is a 7 acre retreat reached by a winding mountain road descending between two ridges lined with hardwood forest and a thick understory of rhododendron and mountain laurel. By the Inn, a mountain stream fills a small trout pond. The upper end forms a wetland, with willows, alders, and other plants that provide habitat for songbirds. Ruby throated Hummingbird can be seen feeding from the summer flowering jewel weed along the edge of the wetland. Nearby, blueberry bushes and blackberry vines provide fruit for both birds and Inn guests. Across the road, a small apple and peach orchard tucked into the hillside provides a nice birding location. Begin by scanning from the highest elevation over the top of the fruit trees for foraging birds and then walk along the forest edge to look and listen for additional species. Visitors can sit in the garden or by the pond to listen in the evening for the resident owls, while in early summer a Whip poor will may provide an evening serenade. The innkeepers can provide information on additional birding opportunities on nearby public hiking trails in Pisgah National Forest, making the Inn an ideal home base for an early morning start.

**Species of Interest:** Whip poor will, Black throated Blue Warbler, Black throated Green Warbler, Ovenbird, Swainson's Warbler

**Habitats:** northern hardwood/cove forest, pond, stream and wetlands

**Special Concerns:** Hunting is permitted in the Pisgah National Forest that adjoins the property. Birders should be aware of current hunting regulations and seasons, and take adequate safety precautions during those times. For more on hunting precautions, see the hunting season information at the beginning of this guide.

**Access & Parking:** The Inn is open to visitation daily by appointment, 10am to 9pm. Park along the paved drive or in the parking area in front of the Inn.

**Directions:** From I 40 take Exit 66 for Ridgecrest. Follow the blue B&B directional signs along with the following directions. Turn north from the exit ramp. At the stop sign, turn right toward Ridgecrest. Continue past the Ridgecrest entrance to the next stop sign. Turn left on Yates Road. Travel approximately 1 mile into the Pisgah National Forest. Veer left on the road marked by a blue Bed & Breakfast sign, adjacent to the Old US 70 barricade, and travel 1.5 miles. The Inn on Mill Creek is on the right. A split rail fence marks the property.

Coordinates: N 35° 38 34

W 82° 15 21

DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 54





North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Central Foothills

#### 2 Mountain Gateway Museum

**Owner:** NC Department of Cultural Resources

102 Water Street, Old Fort, NC 28762      McDowell County  
828 668 9259

<http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/osm/mgw.html>

**Site Description:** The Museum and grounds provide not only an attractive urban birding site, but also interesting historical materials and exhibits of the mountain region for the history enthusiast. The site is located along Mill Creek, a feeder stream of the Catawba River, and is bordered by both lawn and mature fruit and seed bearing trees and vines, which provide an abundance of food and cover for birds. From the Museum, walk a short distance along the stream to the amphitheater, where the stone benches provide a nice place to sit and enjoy the bird activity in the trees and vines. In the summer, when berries are ripe, watch for both mature and immature Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch and others enjoying the seasonal harvest. Eastern Phoebe can be seen foraging over the stream and Chipping Sparrow often search the ground for insects. Continue across the footbridge for a better view downstream of the vine covered edges and the rocky stream bed, and scan the edges of the mowed grounds. During the spring and fall migration, birding surprises might be found in this small, pleasant urban park for the careful observer who is willing to linger.

**Species of Interest:** Eastern Phoebe, Cedar Waxwing, Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore Oriole

**Habitats:** floodplain forest, early successional, river/stream

**Access & Parking:** The Museum grounds are open for birding during daylight hours. The Museum is open noon to 5pm, Monday; 9am to 5pm, Tuesday – Saturday; 2pm to 5pm, Sunday.

**Directions:** From I 40, take Exit 73 for Old Fort. At the end of the exit ramp, turn north on Catawba Avenue, toward historic downtown. In 0.3 miles turn right on Water Street at the Mountain Gateway Museum sign. Parking is on the right.

Coordinates: N 35° 37' 40      W 82° 10' 50      DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 32, 54





North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Central Foothills

#### 3 Cottages at Spring House Farm

**Owner:** Arthur and Zee Campbell

219 Haynes Road, Marion, NC 28752  
828 738 9798

McDowell County

[www.springhousefarm.com](http://www.springhousefarm.com)

**Site Description:** Approaching the Cottages at Spring House Farm is reminiscent of days from long ago, as the 1826 farmhouse ( The Historic Albertus Ledbetter House Listed National Register of Historic Places c.1826) and outbuildings come into view across the meadow and farm pond. The farmhouse is the heart of this 92 acre farm, which also includes six cottages nestled individually and hidden in the woodlands of the hills and valleys. From the office, walk along the drive that continues into the property through mature woodlands and rhododendron, where you might hear thrushes, vireos and other birds singing. Here you will also come to a stream that feeds into a small mountain trout pond with a gazebo. This is a nice place to sit and enjoy the nature sounds of this quiet retreat. Continuing on, the recent addition of a water lily pond provides an open habitat and beyond that, the farm pond and farmhouse will come into view. In the summer, swallows will be busy feeding over the farm pond. Across the fields and meadow, hawks might be seen overhead. Take the mowed pasture trail in the meadow that follows Greasy Creek to search for additional species.

**Species of Interest:** Wild Turkey, Yellow bellied Sapsucker, Hermit Thrush, Ovenbird

**Habitats:** northern hardwood/cove forest, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, stream/wetlands

**Access & Parking:** After turning into the drive, continue to the office on the left for parking and information on birding trails from the innkeepers. An advance call for birding information is recommended. The site is open daily from 10am to 5pm. Donations are encouraged. Historic home tours may be given by appointment (fee).

**Directions:** From I 40, take Exit 81. Turn south on Sugar Hill Road and travel approximately 4.5 miles. Bear right at the fork toward Chimney Rock and Lake Lure. Continue on Sugar Hill Road for approximately 6.5 miles. At the community of Whitehouse (at the Sunbelt gas station), turn right on Ham Creek Road and travel for 0.8 miles. Turn left on Haynes Road to Spring House Farm on the left.

Coordinates: N 35° 32 31 W 82° 05 21 DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 32, 54





North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Central Foothills

#### 4 Mount Ida Nature Preserve

**Owner:** City of Marion

Young's Creek Drive, Marion, NC 28752  
828 652 3551

McDowell County

[www.marionnc.org](http://www.marionnc.org)

**Site Description:** This 35 acre nature preserve is located near the heart of Marion, yet it provides a nice retreat from the bustle of city life. As the moderate to difficult 2 mile trail climbs in elevation, it affords sweeping views of Marion's historic downtown. From the summit, visitors can see Mt. Mitchell and the Blue Ridge mountains to the north. From the parking area, the trail first traverses a power line right of way for a short distance. This area provides early successional habitat where you might hear and see Indigo Bunting, Carolina Wren and other songbirds. Hawks may also be seen perched on the power lines or soaring overhead. Continuing on, the trail makes use of old logging roads as it climbs toward the summit through the forest of oaks, mixed hardwoods and pine. Along the way, birders should watch and listen for woodpeckers and other forest dwelling species. In migration, a variety of warblers may also be seen and heard.

**Species of Interest:** Worm eating Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Scarlet Tanager

**Habitats:** early successional, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine

**Access & Parking:** The preserve is open daily during daylight hours. Park at the trailhead in the designated parking area.

**Directions:** From I 40, take Exit 86. At the end of the exit ramp, turn north on US 226. Drive approximately 1 mile to the intersection of US 221/US 226/Rutherford Road. Turn right on US 221 Business/Rutherford Road toward Marion. Drive 0.8 miles and turn left on Young's Creek Drive. This gravel drive will cross a small creek in a short distance. Take the first right turn after the creek to reach the trailhead and designated parking.

Coordinates: N 35° 40 17    W 81° 59 21    DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 54





North Carolina

# Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

## Central Foothills

### 5 Lake James State Park

**Owner:** NC State Parks

2785 NC 126, Nebo, NC 28761  
828 652 5047

Burke, McDowell Counties

[www.ncparks.gov](http://www.ncparks.gov)

**Site Description:** Lake James State Park is situated on a 35 mile stretch of Lake James shoreline. The park currently offers three hiking trails, two of which lead to overlooks with lake and mountain views. Thirty additional miles of trails will be installed in a new park development, which is currently under construction. A wetland area is accessible from NC 126, approximately 0.5 miles east of the park entrance, but no designated trails currently exist. Steep, forested ridges covered with mixed hardwoods, pines and hemlocks dominate the landscape. Wildflowers are abundant, and the clear waters of Lake James reflect different types of vegetation in each season. A variety of waterbirds can be found on Lake James, including Green Heron and Belted Kingfisher. Scan the skies for Bald Eagle, Red tailed Hawk, Osprey and Pileated Woodpecker. During the nesting season, be on the lookout for a variety of wood warblers, including Hooded and Black throated Green Warblers. Deer, flying squirrel, red and gray fox, rabbit, muskrat and mink also reside at Lake James State Park.

**Species of Interest:** Bald Eagle, Osprey, Hooded Warbler, Yellow throated Warbler, Black throated Green Warbler

**Habitats:** oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, dry coniferous woodlands, early successional, lake

**Access & Parking:** The park is open from 8am to 6pm, November – February; 8am to 8pm, March, April, September, October; 8am to 9pm, May – August. The park office is open weekdays from 8:00am to 4:30pm.

**Directions:** From I 40 traveling west, take the exit for Dysartsville/Lake James (Exit 94) and head north for 0.5 miles to a stop sign. Turn left on US 70 and follow it for 1.5 miles. Turn right on Bridgewater Road and travel 1.2 miles. Turn left on Benfield's Landing Road, and follow it for 2 miles to a stop sign. Turn left on NC 126 and follow it for 1.7 miles to the park entrance on the right.

Coordinates: N 35° 43 54 W 81° 54 11 DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 33





North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Central Foothills

#### 6 Catawba River and Freedom Trail Greenways

**Owner:** City of Morganton

Multiple access points along the Catawba River in Morganton  
828 438 5350

Burke County

[www.ci.morganton.nc.us](http://www.ci.morganton.nc.us)

**Site Description:** The Catawba River and Freedom Trail Greenways are paved trails that follow more than 4 linear miles of the Catawba River and encompass more than 250 acres of land. The trail at the Rocky Ford Access end tends to be less busy and provides more productive, uninterrupted birding. The most productive birding is during April and May, when many migrating songbirds pass through, including American Redstart, Black throated Green, Blackpoll, Palm and Yellow rumped Warblers, Blue headed Vireo, Scarlet Tanager, Louisiana Waterthrush, Orchard Oriole, Rose breasted Grosbeak, Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers, and Ruby crowned Kinglet. Throughout the summer, Yellow throated Warbler, Acadian Flycatcher, Blue Grosbeak, Blue gray Gnatcatcher, Purple Martin, White eyed Vireo, Summer Tanager, Gray Catbird, Great Crested Flycatcher, Northern Parula, and Wood Thrush can be found. In the early successional riparian habitat about 1 mile east of the Greenlee Ford access and along the edges of the agricultural fields about 0.5 miles west of the Rocky Ford access, look for Common Yellowthroat, Indigo Bunting, Field Sparrow, and Yellow breasted Chat. In the large pines at the Catawba Meadows access, Brown headed and White breasted Nuthatch are often present. In winter, Red breasted Nuthatch, Dark eyed Junco, White crowned Sparrow, and White throated Sparrow are common. The Greenlee Ford and River Village access points offer shoal views, favorite places for migrating waterfowl.

**Species of Interest:** Yellow billed Cuckoo, Tree Swallow, Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellow breasted Chat, Northern Parula, wintering waterfowl

**Habitats:** floodplain forest, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, dry coniferous woodlands, river/stream

**Access & Parking:** The greenway is open daily during daylight hours. Parking is available at each access, where kiosks contain maps and educational information. Benches are located approximately every tenth of a mile along the trails. A canoe launch is available.

**Directions:** In Morganton, there are four access points to the Catawba River Greenway (Greenlee Ford, River Village, Catawba Meadows, and Rocky Ford) and one access to the Freedom Trail Greenway. Directions below are given for the Greenlee Ford access. Visit the Web site for maps and additional access information. Greenlee Ford Access: Starting from the Old Courthouse Square in downtown Morganton, travel 2 miles southwest on W. Union Street/US 70, through five traffic lights. Turn right on Greenlee Ford Road. Access parking is at the end of the road on the right.

Coordinates: N 35° 44 25    W 81° 43 05 (Greenlee Ford Access) DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 33







North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Central Foothills

#### 8 South Mountains State Park

**Owner:** NC State Parks

3001 South Mountain Park Avenue, Connelly Springs, NC 28612  
828 433 4772

Burke County

[www.ncparks.gov](http://www.ncparks.gov)

**Site Description:** South Mountains State Park, the largest in North Carolina, encompasses approximately 18,000 acres ranging in elevation from 1,200 to 3,000 feet. The park is located in the transition zone between the mountains and piedmont, so birders can find species from both regions in the park. Visitors can take an easy stroll or a more challenging hike and be rewarded with a wide variety of species. First, stop by the visitor center and check the field, stream, and woodland edge for Indigo Bunting and Eastern Phoebe. At the Jacob Fork Parking Area, the 2.7 mile High Shoals Falls Loop Trail follows the Jacob Fork River through mixed hardwoods and rhododendron thickets. Swainson's Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush are common along this moderate trail, which leads to an 80 foot waterfall. Birders looking for a more challenging hike should try Horseshoe Trail. Park Rangers conduct prescribed burns along this dry ridgeline trail in the winter and spring, creating a mosaic of diverse sites. Look for Prairie and Worm eating Warblers, Red eyed and Blue headed Vireos, and Ovenbird. During winter, birders will find wintering waterfowl at the Clear Creek reservoir on the western side of the park. Hooded Merganser and Ring necked and Wood Ducks are commonly seen there.

**Species of Interest:** Hooded Merganser, Louisiana Waterthrush, Swainson's Warbler, Worm eating Warbler, Black throated Green Warbler

**Habitats:** oak forest & mixed hardwood/pine, dry coniferous woodlands, early successional, river/stream

**Access & Parking:** The Jacob Fork Parking Area is located at the end of South Mountain Park Avenue, approximately 2 miles west of the Visitor Center. The park is open from 8am to 6pm, November – February; 8am to 8pm, March May, September, October; 8am to 9pm, June August.

**Directions:** South Mountains State Park is 20.5 miles south of Morganton. From I 40, turn south on NC 18. Travel 11.1 miles and turn right on Sugarloaf Road (SR 1913). Take Sugarloaf Road 4.3 miles to Old NC 18 and turn left. Travel 2.7 miles and turn right on Ward's Gap Road (SR 1901). After 1.4 miles, turn right on South Mountain Park Avenue (SR 1904).

Coordinates: N 35° 36 09

W 81° 37 42

DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 33, 55

