



North Carolina

Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

Cherokee

1 Mingo Falls

Owner: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian

Big Cove Road/BIA 1410, Cherokee, NC 28719
828-497-9195

Swain County

www.cherokee-nc.com

Site Description: Mingo Falls, on the Qualla Boundary (Cherokee Indian Reservation), is one of the most spectacular falls in the Southern Appalachians. Adjacent to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the 120-foot waterfall cascades over large rock formations, and plunges through tangles of thick rhododendron. The 0.4-mile trail to the base of the falls is short and somewhat strenuous, but offers good footing, improved stairs, benches, and a walking bridge with handrails. The dense foliage provides ample shade and excellent habitat for a variety of breeding songbirds. Each season presents a unique and breathtaking visual experience. For the adventurous, the Mingo Falls Trail continues to the top of the falls.

Species of Interest: Pileated Woodpecker, Wood Thrush, Louisiana Waterthrush, Scarlet Tanager

Habitats: northern hardwoods/cove forest, waterfall

Special Features & Concerns: The area is in the third year of a managed elk reintroduction. It is not uncommon to see elk throughout the area. During the winter months, the trail head tends to ice, making the hike hazardous. The grade incline is about 10%, so prepare for a slightly strenuous hike.

Access & Parking: The site is open daily during daylight hours.

Directions: From Main Street (US 19) in downtown Cherokee, turn right onto Acquoni Road and follow it for 2 miles to Big Cove Road. Big Cove Road becomes BIA 1410. Travel Big Cove Road/BIA 1410 for nearly 5 miles. The parking area for Mingo Falls is on the right.

Coordinates: N 35° 32' 03" W 83° 16' 35"

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2 Oconaluftee Visitor Center

Owner: Great Smoky Mountains National Park

1194 Newfound Gap Road, Cherokee, NC 28719
865-436-1200

Swain County

www.nps.gov/grsm

Site Description: The Oconaluftee Visitor Center, along with the Mountain Farm Museum and Newfound Gap Road, offer some fine birding opportunities within Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Visitor Center and Museum are near the southern entrance to the park, at low elevation. But US 441 extends to 5,000 feet at the Tennessee state line at Newfound Gap. Climbing in elevation and stopping along the road at different trailheads and pull-offs gives a birder numerous opportunities to experience the extensive bird diversity of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The best time to bird is from late April through June, when numerous warblers and other songbirds can be heard and seen. Common species include Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos, Yellow-throated, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Canada, Hooded, and Black-and-white Warblers, Northern Parula, Louisiana Waterthrush, Winter Wren, Wood Thrush, Veery, Scarlet Tanager and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Wild Turkey can sometimes be seen feeding in the fields at Oconaluftee. Watch for Ruffed Grouse along the edges of the road at higher elevations. Other species found at the higher elevations include Red Crossbill, Black-capped Chickadee and Pine Siskin. A variety of migrating songbirds, such as Blackpoll Warbler and Swainson's Thrush, can also be found during spring and fall migration. Winter birding can be slow, but fruitful if one finds a mixed-species flock. Please report any rare or unusual sightings to the Visitor Center, including description, precise location (GPS coordinates if available), date, and observer contact information.

Species of Interest: Louisiana Waterthrush, Veery, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin

Habitats: spruce-fir forest, northern hardwood/cove forest, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, early successional, river/stream

Special Concerns: Use of recordings to attract birds or to get them to call is not permitted anywhere on Great Smoky Mountains National Park property, except as part of a research project approved by National Park staff. There are several rare and endangered plant species growing in the area. Stay on the trails to avoid damaging these plants.

Access & Parking: The Visitor Center grounds can be accessed daily during daylight hours. The Center is open January – April, 8:30am to 4:30pm; May, 8:30am to 5pm; June – August, 8am to 6pm; September and October, 8:30am to 6pm; November and December, 8:30am to 4:30pm.

Directions: From Cherokee, travel north on US 441 into Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Coordinates: N 35° 30' 50"

W 83° 18' 22"

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3 Oconaluftee Indian Village Botanical Garden

Owner: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian

Drama Road, beside Mountainside Theatre, Cherokee, NC 28719
828-497-9195

Swain County

www.cherokee-nc.com

Site Description: The Indian Village Botanical Gardens Trail was created in the 1950's to showcase native and cultivated plants. Pocket flower gardens provide color along the path, and there are benches for resting and enjoying the woodland setting. The Gardens Trail starts just to the right of the ticket booth for the Oconaluftee Indian Village, and the trail is open to the public at no charge. Tickets to the Village are not required to walk the trail. The trail gently winds uphill to a traditional Cherokee vegetable garden where heirloom varieties are cultivated. The Oconaluftee Garden Trail forms a loop, bringing hikers back to the trailhead. The Garden Trail is well-shaded by thick, but well-maintained foliage, and is perfect for birding, hiking, and exploring. After walking the Gardens Trail, stop at the Indian Village and enjoy a visit with the Cherokee people in a replica of an 18th century Cherokee village. At the entrance to the Village there are restrooms, a gift shop, and concession area.

Species of Interest: Pileated Woodpecker, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Hooded Warbler, Scarlet Tanager

Habitats: oak forest & mixed hardwood/pine

Access & Parking: The site is open daily, 9am to 5:30pm, from May 9 to October 18.

Directions: From Main Street (US 19) turn on Tsali Blvd. (US 411). Travel 0.6 miles to the intersection of Tsali Blvd. and Drama Road. The Museum of the Cherokee Indian will be on the left. Turn left onto Drama Road and travel 0.5 miles to the Mountain Side Theatre, where the Village and Botanical Gardens are located.

Coordinates: N 35° 29' 14"

W 83° 19' 23"

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4 Oconaluftee Island Park

Owner: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian

Tsali Blvd. (US 441), Cherokee, NC 28719
828-497-9195

Swain County

www.cherokee-nc.com

Site Description: The Oconaluftee Island Park is the hub of recreation in Cherokee, at a place where the Oconaluftee River splits, creating two islands in the center of the river. The 4-acre river island park is handicap accessible and is equipped with restrooms and three large picnic pavilions able to accommodate large parties. A trail follows the edge of the island and offers good views both up- and down-stream. The best time of year to visit the park is during spring and fall migration. Check for Spotted Sandpiper and Louisiana Waterthrush along the rocky banks of the river. The island has also been equipped with pre-recorded cultural, historical and botanical information in posts set at strategic locations. Information can be heard in English and in the Cherokee language.

Species of Interest: Spotted Sandpiper, Belted Kingfisher, Louisiana Waterthrush, Indigo Bunting

Habitats: floodplain forest, river/stream

Access & Parking: The site is open daily during daylight hours. Access to the islands is attained by crossing foot bridges at each end of the recreation areas.

Directions: The Island Park is at the intersection of Main Street (US 19) and Tsali Blvd. (US 441) in downtown Cherokee. There is ample parking along US 441 and Acquoni Road, which border the park.

Coordinates: N 35° 28' 45" W 83° 19' 13"

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5 Riverwalk at Riverbend

Owner: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian

Main Street (NC 19), Cherokee, NC 28719
828-497-9195

Swain County

www.cherokee-nc.com

Site Description: The Riverwalk at Riverbend follows the Oconaluftee River behind the businesses in the central shopping district of Cherokee. The path is paved and well landscaped, with plenty of parking and easy access to food, shopping and restrooms. The Riverwalk currently includes just a two-block segment, but there are future plans to extend the walk for two miles through the downtown business district. The trail provides nice opportunities to view a variety of tree-dwelling songbirds at eye level. Also be on the lookout for waterbirds, shorebirds, and swallows as you meander along the Riverwalk.

Species of Interest: Spotted Sandpiper, Green Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Louisiana Waterthrush

Habitats: floodplain forest, river/stream

Access & Parking: The site is open daily during daylight hours.

Directions: A parking lot is located adjacent to the visitor center kiosk on Main Street (US 19) in downtown Cherokee.

Coordinates: N 35° 28' 32" W 83° 19' 09"

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6 Ferguson Fields (Kituwah Farm)

Owner: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian

2877 Governors Island Road, Bryson City, NC 28713
828-497-9195

Swain County

www.cherokee-nc.com

Site Description: The sacred “Mothers town” of the Cherokee, some archaeologists have estimated that Cherokees and their ancestors have occupied Kituwah for nearly 10,000 years. The Cherokee mound on-site is a remnant of the great council house that existed 200 years ago. Visitors are welcome, but need to treat the site with respect. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian was able to reclaim this land for the tribe in 1996. In recent years the land has been used to grow crops, graze livestock and, briefly, was even used as an airport. Today, a portion of the 309-acre property is still used for small, remote control aircraft and some farming continues. Park in the lot near the entrance and walk the farm lanes past garden and farm plots to the Tuckaseegee River. The trees along the river can be a haven for migrating warblers in spring and fall. Follow the farm road to the right (north) and along the fence rows. A shrub-bordered channelized stream and seasonal wetlands often prove productive for migrating songbirds, waterfowl, and occasionally, wading birds and rails in spring and fall. Willow Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat breed in this area, and a variety of sparrows, including White-throated, White-crowned, Savannah, Song, Field, Chipping, and Swamp Sparrows, can be found from October through March.

Species of Interest: Northern Harrier, Bobolink, Willow Flycatcher, Great Crested Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Yellow Warbler

Habitats: early successional, floodplain forest, river/stream

Access & Parking: The site is open daily during daylight hours.

Directions: From downtown Bryson City, follow Main Street/US 19 east for 3 miles (Main Street becomes Governors Island Road). Ferguson Fields/Kituwah Farm is on the right. Signage marks the entrance. From Cherokee, the site is approximately 8 miles west on US 19.

Coordinates: N 35° 26' 20" W 83° 24' 09"

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