



North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Haywood County

#### 1 Max Patch

**Owner:** Pisgah National Forest

Max Patch Road (SR 1182), southwest of Hot Springs, NC  
828-257-4200

Haywood, Madison Counties  
[www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc](http://www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc)

**Site Description:** As you drive up to Max Patch on NC 206/Max Patch Road, scan the fields for Willow Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Orchard Oriole, Yellow-breasted Chat, Golden-winged and Chestnut-sided Warblers. Also watch and listen for American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, Least Flycatcher, House Wren, Northern Bobwhite, and Red-tailed and Broad-winged Hawks. As the habitat changes from open fields to forest, check for Worm-eating Warbler, Dark-eyed Junco, Blackburnian Warbler and American Redstart. Be sure to watch for Ruffed Grouse near the roadside. Park at the trailhead for Max Patch Bald and the Appalachian Trail. Max Patch is a grassy bald at 4,629 feet in elevation. The view on a clear day can be spectacular. Northern Bobwhite, Field Sparrow, and Barn and Rough-winged Swallows are all possibilities on the bald. Continue down Max Patch Road about 0.5 miles to a small trout pond followed by a rhododendron thicket on the right. Walk along the thicket to watch for Hooded, Black-throated Blue, Chestnut-sided and Canada Warblers, Winter and House Wrens, Dark-eyed Junco and Broad-winged Hawk. Turn around and come back down Max Patch Road to Cold Springs Road on the right. Travel down Cold Springs Road (FR 148) for approximately 3 miles, to a parking and picnic area on the left. Walk up the road to Horse Camp, listening for Blackburnian, Yellow-throated and Hooded Warblers, and Northern Parula. Continue down Cold Springs Road to the I-40 Exit at Harmon Den (Exit 7).

**Species of Interest:** Broad-winged Hawk, Ruffed Grouse, Least Flycatcher, Golden-winged Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler

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

**Special Concern:** Hunting is allowed on Pisgah National Forest lands during certain times of the year. 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:** Parking is available at Max Patch Bald and at a picnic area on Cold Springs Road (FR 148). The site can be accessed daily during daylight hours.

**Directions:** *From I-40*, take Exit 24 and head north on NC 209 (Crabtree Road, which becomes Rush Fork Road). After 8 miles, at the intersection of Betsys Gap Road, stay straight – this road becomes Max Patch Road (SR 1182). Follow Max Patch Road for approximately 13 miles, to the parking area for Max Patch Bald. *From Hot Springs*, follow NC 209 just over 7 miles south, to Meadow Fork Road (SR 1175). Turn right on Meadow Fork Road and go 5.3 miles to Little Creek Road (SR 1181). Follow Little Creek Road for 2 miles (road turns into gravel). At the top of the mountain, turn right on Max Patch Road (SR 1182); parking for Max Patch is approximately 1.5 miles on the right.

Coordinates: N 34° 47' 38" W82° 57' 45" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 30





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### Haywood County

#### 2 Big Creek

**Owner:** Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Exit 451 (TN) off I-40, at Waterville  
865-436-1200

Haywood County

[www.nps.gov/grsm](http://www.nps.gov/grsm)

**Site Description:** Numerous trails depart from the Big Creek camping area, some of which follow the creek, others head up the ridge to the Appalachian Trail. The Baxter Creek and Big Creek Trails start at the picnic area. Chestnut Branch Trail starts at the ranger station and connects to the Appalachian Trail; backcountry permits can be filled out at the Big Creek Ranger Station. The best birding at this site is in spring, 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, Hooded, and Black-and-white Warblers, American Redstart, Northern Parula, Louisiana Waterthrush, Wood Thrush, Veery, Scarlet Tanager and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Whip-poor-will can be heard at night in some locations and Wild Turkey may appear anywhere. Many additional species can be found during migration, including Blackpoll and Cape May Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, and a variety of other migrants. Please report any rare or unusual sightings to the park, including description, precise location (GPS coordinates if available), date, and observer contact information.

**Species of Interest:** Louisiana Waterthrush, Veery, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak

**Habitats:** northern hardwood/cove forest, early successional, river/stream

**Special Concern:** 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.

**Access & Parking:** The site is open year-round. Parking is available at the Ranger Station and picnic area.

**Directions:** Head west on I-40 to Exit 451 (just over the TN state line) at Waterville. Follow this road past the Walters Power Generating Station to a 4-way intersection. Continue straight through and follow signs into Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Coordinates: N 35° 45' 36" W 83° 06' 20" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 30





North Carolina

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### Haywood County

#### 3 Heintooga Spur Road

**Owner:** Blue Ridge Parkway, Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Blue Ridge Parkway Mileposts 456-462  
865-436-1200

Haywood, Jackson, Swain Counties  
[www.nps.gov/blri](http://www.nps.gov/blri), [www.nps.gov/grsm](http://www.nps.gov/grsm)

**Site Description:** The remoteness of this area from the more popular parts of the Great Smoky Mountains make the 9-mile Heintooga Spur Road ideal for easily accessible birding away from heavy traffic. Spring arrives late in this area. The best birding begins in May and continues through June and into early July. Although never a guarantee, this area is one of the most reliable locations for Red Crossbill in late spring and summer. They may be seen anywhere, but the Balsam Mountain campground near the end of the paved road and the picnic area at the end of the road are often the most reliable locations. The campground is also an excellent spot for Least Flycatcher and Pine Siskin, but these also can be found at various places along the road. Check for Hermit Thrush at Polls Gap, and Black-capped Chickadee between Polls Gap and the picnic area at the end of the paved road. Many species of warbler can be found along the road, including Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Canada, Blackburnian, Black-and-white, and Chestnut-sided Warblers. Wild Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, and occasionally an elk can be found walking along the road, especially early in the morning. Stop at the Mile High Overlook and listen for Black-billed Cuckoo, which have occasionally been heard in this area. Other species common in this area include Winter Wren, Veery, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Brown Creeper, Dark-eyed Junco and Red-breasted Nuthatch.

**Species of Interest:** Ruffed Grouse, Least Flycatcher, Black-capped Chickadee, Blackburnian Warbler, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin

**Habitats:** spruce-fir forest, northern hardwood/cove forest, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, 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 road is open daily, except during Parkway closures. However, the northern section of Heintooga Road and the Balsam Mountain Road is usually closed from the end of October to early May. The campground and restrooms are open only from early May through mid-October. Parking is available at designated overlooks.

**Directions:** From Maggie Valley, take NC 19 west to the Blue Ridge Parkway entrance at Soco Gap (Milepost 455.7). Once on the Parkway, turn toward Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Heintooga Spur Road is at Wolf Laurel Gap (Milepost 458.2), about 3 miles from Soco Gap.

Coordinates: N 35° 34' 21"      W 83° 10' 46"      DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 52





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## Birding Trail

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### Haywood County

#### 4 Waterrock Knob

**Owner:** Blue Ridge Parkway

Blue Ridge Parkway Mileposts 451.2  
828-271-4779

Haywood, Jackson Counties

[www.nps.gov/blri](http://www.nps.gov/blri)

**Site Description:** Waterrock Knob is an interesting and convenient stopover for birders traveling along the southwestern end of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Information, exhibits and restrooms are available during the summer at the Visitor Center; the panoramic view is spectacular; and the 1.2 mile loop trail to the summit and back provides some excellent high elevation birding through a variety of habitats. The trail begins in the parking lot and is paved part of the way. Although it is somewhat strenuous in locations, it is well worth reaching the peak at 6,400 feet, and there are benches along the way to stop and rest. From May through September, look for Broad-winged Hawk, Ruffed Grouse, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Hairy Woodpecker, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Veery, Cedar Waxwing, Blue-headed Vireo, Dark-eyed Junco, and Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Black-and-white and Canada Warblers. Many other warbler species may be seen during the fall migration. Tennessee and Bay-breasted Warblers become fairly common in September and early October. Although most birds leave the area by late fall, Common Raven, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, Brown Creeper, Dark-eyed Junco and Golden-crowned Kinglet may remain through the winter.

**Species of Interest:** Ruffed Grouse, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Black-capped Chickadee, Winter Wren, Brown Creeper

**Habitats:** spruce-fir forest, northern hardwood/cove forest, early successional (mountain 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 the Visitor Center.

**Directions:** From Maggie Valley, take NC 19 west to the Blue Ridge Parkway entrance at Soco Gap. Once on the Parkway, turn east toward Asheville. Waterrock Knob is about 4.5 miles from Soco Gap.

Coordinates: N 35° 27' 35" W 83° 08' 28"

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### Haywood County

#### 5 Lake Junaluska

**Owner:** Lake Junaluska Assembly

91 North Lakeshore Drive, Lake Junaluska NC 28785  
828-452-2881

Haywood County

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

**Site Description:** Lake Junaluska is a 200-acre lake surrounded by a 1,200-acre retreat and conference center. From the Welcome Center, follow North Lakeshore Drive to Memory Lane. Turn right on Memory Lane and park at the Aquatic Center, which provides a good panoramic view of the lake. During winter, Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot, Lesser Scaup, Hooded Merganser, and Ring-necked and Ruddy Ducks can be seen on the lake. From the pool, return to North Lakeshore Drive and turn right. In 0.5 miles, bear right on Chapel Lane and turn into the Memorial Chapel parking lot, which provides another good view of the lake. Check for Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls. Common Loon can be seen from this viewing point in early winter and spring. Continue on to the Junaluska Cross and further around the lake on North Lakeshore Drive as it rises in elevation. At the crest of the hill is a parking area with another great view of the lake. This area is a good warbler trap in late April and early May. Continue on North Lakeshore Drive across the dam, at which point the road becomes South Lakeshore Drive. Continue to the next pull-off on the right. Scan the lake in fall and late winter for Common Loon, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, Wood Duck, Redhead, Bufflehead, and Red-breasted Merganser. Greater Scaup and Common Goldeneye are occasionally present. Continue on South Lakeshore Drive to US 19, stopping for opportunities to scan the lake further. Occasionally, Horned Grebe and Caspian and Forster's Terns can also be seen.

**Species of Interest:** Blue-winged Teal, Common Goldeneye, Northern Shoveler, Greater Scaup, Common Loon, Horned Grebe

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

**Access & Parking:** Numerous parking areas and viewpoints are highlighted in the site description. Stop in at the Bethea Welcome Center, or visit the Website, for a map of the grounds. Lake Junaluska can be visited daily during daylight hours.

**Directions:** Coming from Asheville or points east, take I-40 West to Exit 27 (US 19/23). Travel 3.5 miles on US 19/23 and take Exit 103. Travel about 1 mile to the front entrance of Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center on the right.

Coordinates: N 35° 31' 25" W 82° 58' 54" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 52





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### Haywood County

#### 6 Southern Great Balsam Mountains

**Owner:** Blue Ridge Parkway

Blue Ridge Parkway Mileposts 422.4-431  
828-271-4779

Haywood, Jackson Counties

[www.nps.gov/blri](http://www.nps.gov/blri)

**Site Description:** Birding this section of the Blue Ridge Parkway gives the birder a sensation of being in the far north. The climate, habitat, and bird species are more reminiscent of Canada than the southern US. Winter Wren, Brown Creeper, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Veery, Dark-eyed Junco and Blue-headed Vireo are common throughout the area. Watch for Common Raven and flocks of Pine Siskin, Cedar Waxwing and Red Crossbill. The most frequently seen warblers include Canada, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue and Blackburnian Warblers. This area is the southernmost extent of the range of the Hermit Thrush and Black-capped Chickadee. In May, listen for Northern Saw-whet Owl after dark near Richland Balsam and at other overlooks along the parkway, and look for displaying American Woodcock at dusk at the Cowee Mountains Overlook. For birding away from traffic, take the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, which parallels the parkway in some areas. Access points with good parking can be found at the Rough Butt Bald Overlook and the Bear Pen Gap Overlook. The 1.5-mile loop trail to the top of Richland Balsam and back is accessible from the Haywood-Jackson Overlook; this is an excellent location to look for Black-capped Chickadee. Alder Flycatcher can sometimes be found at the Richland Balsam Overlook.

**Species of Interest:** Winter Wren, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Veery, Hermit Thrush, Pine Siskin

**Habitats:** spruce-fir forest, northern hardwood/cove forest, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, 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. A good trail map is highly recommended for hiking anywhere in this section of the Parkway. Some trails on the east side of the Parkway are in a wilderness area and can be unmarked.

**Directions:** From Waynesville take US 23/74 west to the Blue Ridge Parkway entrance at Balsam Gap (Milepost 443.1). Head east on the Parkway for 11 miles to the Richland Balsam Overlook (Milepost 431.4).

Coordinates: N 35° 21' 58" W 82° 59' 30" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 52

