



North Carolina

Birding Trail

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Watauga County

1 Elk Knob State Park

Owner: NC State Parks

5564 Meat Camp Road, Todd, NC 28684
828-297-7261

Watauga County

www.ncparks.gov

Site Description: Rising more than 5,500 feet above sea level in northwestern North Carolina, Elk Knob sits among the high peaks of the Amphibolite Gneiss range. Dominated by northern hardwood forest, Elk Knob is home to a wide variety of high elevation birds, and its ample beech forests provide forage for good numbers of Ruffed Grouse, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Wild Turkey. Other breeding birds here include Broad-winged Hawk, Scarlet Tanager, Veery, Hairy Woodpecker, Blue-headed Vireo, Canada Warbler and Ovenbird. The top of the mountain features an extensive heath bald, with opportunities to see Gray Catbird, Eastern Towhee and Chestnut-sided Warbler. And, despite a lack of conifers on the mountain, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Hermit Thrush have been found during the breeding season. Near the entrance to the park, Vesper and Field Sparrows, and Golden-winged Warbler, are common during the breeding season. Look for them in the fields adjacent to Meat Camp Road, west of the park. During the fall migration, the birding can be very good right at the entrance to the park and at the heath bald on top, including, at times, hundreds of songbirds and many raptors. Winter is relatively quiet, but the grassy balds on adjacent peaks and valleys (e.g., Snake and Rich Mountain, Long Hope Valley) usually attract wintering and migrating Golden Eagle and Northern Harrier.

Species of Interest: Broad-winged Hawk, Blue-headed Vireo, Canada Warbler, Ovenbird, Vesper Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Habitats: northern hardwood/cove forest, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, rocky outcrop, early successional

Access & Parking: The park is open 8am to 6pm, November – February; 8am to 8pm, March – May, September, October; 8am to 9pm, June – August. The park office is open 8am to 5pm, Monday – Friday.

Directions: From the intersection of US 421 North and NC 194 North, east of Boone, proceed north on NC 194 for approximately 4 miles and turn left on Meat Camp Road. Travel along Meat Camp Road for 5.5 miles to Elk Knob-Snake Mountain Gap. Turn right into the natural area.

Coordinates: N 36° 19' 57" W 81° 41' 22"

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Watauga County

2 Meat Camp Creek Environmental Studies Area

Owners: Curtis and Mary Smalling

Appaloosa Trail, Boone, NC
828-265-0198

Watauga County

Site Description: The Meat Camp Creek Environmental Studies Area is a private 9.5-acre tract open to the public for birding and nature study. Since record keeping began in 1999, over 170 species of birds have been recorded here. An approximately 0.75-mile grassy path winds its way through the wetlands. Boardwalks provide crossing for channels and saturated areas. The migration seasons can be especially rewarding here, as migrating songbirds, wading birds, and others regularly visit. For best light during a morning visit, walk the trail in a clockwise direction to keep the early sun at your back along the riparian corridor. Sparrow migration in October and November is especially good for Lincoln's Sparrow, as well as eight other sparrow species, including White-crowned, White-throated, Savannah, Swamp, Song and Vesper Sparrows. Summer breeding birds include both Least and Willow Flycatchers, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Green Heron, and occasionally, Black-billed Cuckoo. Four species of Vireo (Red-eyed, Blue-headed, White-eyed, and Yellow-throated) have nested here. Both Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoo regularly occur in August and September. This site also hosted a rare mountain nesting record for Virginia Rail in 2003. Virginia Rail, Sora and American Bittern are usually seen each spring in April.

Species of Interest: Black-billed Cuckoo, Least Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow Warbler, Lincoln's Sparrow

Habitats: early successional, river/stream, bog/wetlands

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

Directions: From the intersection of US 421 North and NC 194 North, east of Boone, proceed north on NC 194 for 2.7 miles to Castleford Road on the right. Go 1.7 miles to Appaloosa Trail on the left. At both of these turns, watch for small white signs for the Watauga Gun Club. Go 0.1 miles on Appaloosa Trail and cross Meat Camp Creek on a one-lane bridge. Take an immediate left into the grassy parking area.

Coordinates: N 36° 15' 50" W 81° 37' 43" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 13





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Watauga County

3 Boone Greenway

Owner: Town of Boone

Anne Marie Drive, Boone, NC
828-262-6200

Watauga County

www.townofboone.net

Site Description: This 3-mile portion of the Boone Greenway provides access to a wide variety of habitats as it follows the New River. Agricultural lands, recreational fields, wooded areas, and a healthy riparian corridor attract many breeding, migrating and wintering species. During spring and late summer, look for migrating shorebirds along the river and in the recreational fields. Killdeer are very numerous, but rarer shorebirds turn up with regularity, including Semipalmated Plover, Pectoral Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe and Least Sandpiper. Migrating warblers are also common, with Tennessee Warblers peaking in September. Yellow-throated, Red-eyed, Blue-headed, and occasionally White-eyed Vireos are all present and Philadelphia's Vireo is possible, especially in the fall. Summer breeders include Willow Flycatcher and Eastern Kingbird, as well as Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Osprey regularly occur in April, and from August through October. Fall sparrows, including Lincoln's, Vesper, Savannah, Swamp and White-crowned Sparrows, can be found in the weedy borders and edges of ball fields. Oddly enough, almost all of the handful of local records for White Ibis have occurred along the Greenway. Note, the shorebirding in the recreational fields is heavily influenced by weather, time of year, and the presence of puddles or very moist conditions. Most interesting birds have been seen after tropical systems in the summer and fall.

Species of Interest: Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Willow Flycatcher, Northern Parula, Tennessee Warbler, Yellow Warbler

Habitats: early successional, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, river/stream, bog/wetlands

Access & Parking: The greenway is open daily during daylight hours. The Parks and Recreation parking area end of the Greenway is dominated by recreational fields, and you have to walk about 1 mile to get into more mixed habitats. For quicker access to wooded habitats, use the Humane Society entrance and parking area.

Directions: There are two primary trailheads for the greenway. The first is located near the Watauga Parks and Recreation Swim Complex and Optimist Fields Complex. From State Farm Road in Boone, turn on Hunting Hills Lane and into the parking lot behind Boone Fire Station Number 2. At the other end of the greenway, parking is available at the Watauga Humane Society and Boone Sewage Treatment Plant off Charlie Holler Road on Casey Lane. Charlie Holler Road is accessed at the New River Bridge on US 421 just east of Boone. A map is available for all trailheads at the Website.

Coordinates: N 36° 12' 11" W 81° 39' 09" (Optimist Fields Trailhead) DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 13





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4 Valle Crucis Community Park

Owner: Valle Crucis Community Park, Inc.

Broadstone Road, Valle Crucis, NC
828-963-9239

Watauga County

Site Description: This large community park is situated along the Watauga River and bounded by agricultural lands and forest. The park also includes short grass soccer fields, a small pond and associated wetlands, and numerous fencerow habitats. Breeding season is prime time for a visit, with seven species of flycatcher nesting in the park, including three Empidonax Flycatchers (Acadian, Least, and Willow). Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Eastern Kingbird and Great Crested Flycatcher round out the breeding flycatchers. Other common breeding birds include Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Cedar Waxwing, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and Yellow-throated, Red-eyed, Blue-headed and Warbling Vireos. Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler and Common Yellowthroat breed here and over 25 warbler species can be seen during migration. Migration periods are especially good for songbirds, waterfowl and wading birds. Tree, Barn and Northern Rough-winged Swallows nest in the park, and recently Cliff Swallows nested just outside the park. This site regularly attracts rarities, including the only county records for Chuck-wills-widow and King Rail, and rare sightings of Connecticut Warbler, Dicksissel and others. It is an excellent location to see Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos in August and September. The park is especially pleasant for beginning birders, with its open habitats affording excellent views of most species.

Species of Interest: Least Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Yellow-throated Vireo, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow Warbler, Baltimore Oriole

Habitats: floodplain forest, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, early successional, river/stream/wetlands

Access & Parking: The park is open daily during daylight hours. During the week, crowds are non-existent, but weekends can be very busy. A weekly Wednesday bird walk is conducted here at 8:30am from March through October (fee).

Directions: From the intersection of US 321 and NC 105 in Boone, travel south on NC 105, toward Linville, for approximately 4 miles. At the traffic light just past the Watauga River Bridge, turn right on Broadstone Road (follow signs for the Mast General Store). Proceed 4 miles to the unpaved park entrance road immediately before the Mast Store Annex. Drive to the large parking area at the end of the entrance road.

Coordinates: N 36° 12' 28" W 81° 46' 13" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 13





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5 Buckeye Lake Recreation Area

Owner: Town of Beech Mountain

206 Grassy Gap Creek Road, Beech Mountain NC 28604
828-387-4236

Watauga County

www.townofbeechmountain.com

Site Description: The Buckeye Lake Recreation Area features prime mid- to high-elevation forest, Buckeye Lake, developed areas around the recreation center and connections to other hiking opportunities in and around Beech Mountain. During the breeding season, follow the Falls Trail along the creek through mature forest. Here you can find Cedar Waxwing, Wood Thrush, Veery and a variety of warbler species, including Ovenbird, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Canada, Hooded and Black-and-white Warblers. Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Scarlet Tanager are also reliable birds here. The open areas around the recreation center and lake host Tree, Barn, and Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Indigo Bunting, Gray Catbird, American Goldfinch, Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow and Eastern Towhee. Also listen for Pine Siskin and Red Crossbill, which are often present, especially in good cone crop years on Beech Mountain. While driving to and from the area, be on the lookout for Ruffed Grouse, which are often seen crossing the roads. Woodpeckers are easy to find here, especially Hairy, but also Downy and Pileated Woodpeckers and Northern Flicker. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker breed on some spots on the mountain. While visiting Buckeye Lake, be sure to check out some of the 15+ miles of trails, some of them at high elevation.

Species of Interest: Ruffed Grouse, Cedar Waxwing, Black-and-white Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Canada Warbler

Habitats: oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, rocky outcrop, river/stream, lake

Access & Parking: The site is open daily during daylight hours. The visitor center is open 8:30am to 8:30pm, Monday – Saturday; 12pm to 6pm, Sunday.

Directions: From Beech Mountain Town Hall, continue on Beech Mountain Parkway for approximately 2 miles. Turn right on Pine Ridge Road. Follow Pine Ridge Road for 3 miles to the bottom of the mountain. The entrance to Buckeye Lake Recreation Area is on the right. Directional signs for Buckeye Lake Recreation Area and Buckeye Recreation Center are situated along the road.

Coordinates: N 36° 13' 12" W 81° 54' 17" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 13

