



## VIRGINIAS' WARBLERS

May 30, 2012 to Jun 3, 2012

John Rowlett & John Coons

Every Virginias' Warblers tour—over the past 20 occasions—is sensational, but each becomes a sensation in its own way, as those participants who have taken this tour no fewer than four times can attest! This year was especially memorable for the lovely morning on Gaudineer Knob (complete with a Snowshoe Hare, a first-timer for the tour), the red morph Eastern Screech-Owl perched along the James River high above Prothonotary and Yellow-throated warblers, the strikingly patterned Red-headed Woodpecker showing off for all to admire (thanks to sharp-eyed Iowa Bill!), and the spectacular Bobolink performance conducted repeatedly on the fence before us. As extraordinary as the two-dozen-plus smartly dressed warblers always are, their exciting encounters are but the ordinary produce of this superb tour. And that's saying something! The most unexpected bird has to have been the Merlin that flew over Hevener Farm in the Blue Grass Valley, whereas of the expected species, the Kentucky Warbler offered the greatest relief—eleventh hour at that!

We started out birding along the James River and Hardware River bottoms, moved westward to the Blue Ridge Parkway, then across the Shenandoah Valley to the Blue Grass Valley, the Allegheny Mountains, and the Red Spruce bogs of West Virginia. We skirted some rain showers and got caught by one downpour at the Goodall Farm, but that didn't last and it certainly didn't dampen our enthusiasm for the beauty of those mountains.

Individual species are annotated below on the triplist. There will no doubt be some highlight of yours I've overlooked, but I hope the annotations give you a sense of the pleasure we took in birding collectively and convivially this exceptional region of our country. Kingfisher and I enjoyed our group immensely and hope to see each of you again soon on another tour.

--John

For more information about this tour, including future departures, visit our website at [www.fieldguides.com](http://www.fieldguides.com). And to see this same triplist online, go to <http://www.fieldguides.com/triplists/war12LIST.pdf> and you will find the list in its entirety.

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### KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

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## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*)

### Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*) – Some nice views of this rather southern vulture.

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*)

### Pandionidae (Osprey)

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Seen over the James by the group while K-fisher and I were getting the vans.

### Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Super views of a perched adult in the Blue Grass Valley, thanks to Mitzi's good eye. Another was seen (perhaps the same individual) kettling with Turkey Vultures over the Hevener Farm deck.

**BROAD-WINGED HAWK** (*Buteo platypterus*) [\*]

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Several seen in flight.

### Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*) – Five or six individuals scattered throughout the Blue Grass Valley.

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – A real surprise! Seen flying over by K-fisher and a few of the participants while on the porch at the Hevener Farm in the Blue Grass Valley. [b]

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*)

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

**YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus americanus*)

Strigidae (Owls)

**EASTERN SCREECH-OWL** (*Megascops asio*) – Wow, what a great find by K-fisher earlier in the day! He was able to refind this rather scarce red morph and scope it for all to admire. It was the first owl ever for a couple of participants. Its "ears" were really erect.

**BARRED OWL** (*Strix varia*) – Spectacular appearance of a bird in response to playback at the Humpback Rocks picnic area in the Blue Ridge.

Apodidae (Swifts)

**CHIMNEY SWIFT** (*Chaetura pelagica*)

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus colubris*) – Several seen, including a male perched up at the first Mourning Warbler spot and one perched at Bramble Hill.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle alcyon*) [\*]

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

**RED-HEADED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) – Great looks at one of the most sensational birds of North America. Good spotting, Bill!

**RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes carolinus*)

**YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – Real good studies of several.

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides pubescens*)

**HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides villosus*)

**NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED)** (*Colaptes auratus auratus*)

**PILEATED WOODPECKER** (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – Nice views of a responsive bird in the Blue Grass Valley where we saw the male Baltimore Oriole.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

**EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE** (*Contopus virens*)

**ACADIAN FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax virescens*) – One of four Empids encountered on the tour.

**ALDER FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax alnorum*) – This was another one; seen and heard well at two locations in the willow swamp.

**WILLOW FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax traillii*) – Seen, heard, and studied along the Greenbrier River at Bartow.

**LEAST FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax minimus*) – Darn, the only one we didn't see; it was heard at the Science Camp. [\*]

**EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*) – Daily. [N]

**GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus crinitus*) – One at Humpback Rocks in the Blue Ridge.

**EASTERN KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) – One seen in the Blue Grass Valley.

Vireonidae (Vireos)

**WHITE-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo griseus*) – Heard our first afternoon. [\*]

**BLUE-HEADED VIREO** (*Vireo solitarius*) – Seen in the higher elevations.

**RED-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo olivaceus*) – Daily.

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*

**BLUE JAY** (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

**AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*)

*Hirundinidae (Swallows)*

**NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

**PURPLE MARTIN** (*Progne subis*) – A pair at a Martin house near Scottsville.

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*)

**CLIFF SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

*Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)*

**CAROLINA CHICKADEE** (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Several our first afternoon near the James.

**BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE** (*Poecile atricapillus*) – The regular chickadee at the higher elevations, usually over 3500 feet. A pair were at the Goodall's farm.

**TUFTED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus bicolor*)

*Sittidae (Nuthatches)*

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta canadensis*) – A big family on Gaudineer Knob.

**WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta carolinensis*) – Along the James and in the Blue Ridge.

*Certhiidae (Treecreepers)*

**BROWN CREEPER** (*Certhia americana*) – Nice looks at a pair carrying food in Blister Swamp while we were trying to see Northern Waterthrush. [N]

*Troglodytidae (Wrens)*

**CAROLINA WREN** (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

**HOUSE WREN** (*Troglodytes aedon*) – Nesting at Margaret's Bramble Hill. [N]

**WINTER WREN** (*Troglodytes hiemalis*) – Tough to see well, but easy to hear delivering its musically complex song at Gaudineer Knob and at the Virgin Spruce parking area.

*Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)*

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

*Regulidae (Kinglets)*

**GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus satrapa*) – Striking displays by responsive males showing their flame-colored crowns.

*Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia sialis*) – Daily. [N]

**VEERY** (*Catharus fuscescens*) – Excellent study of a responsive bird at the Science Camp. What a fine song.

**SWAINSON'S THRUSH** (*Catharus ustulatus*) – Another fine song. Seen best in Blister Swamp, but at least one at Gaudineer Knob.

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*) – Seen well on Gaudineer Knob and at the Virgin Spruce trailhead. Another outstanding song.

**WOOD THRUSH** (*Hylocichla mustelina*) – Heard in the Blue Ridge. [\*]

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) [N]

*Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)*

**GRAY CATBIRD** (*Dumetella carolinensis*)

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*)

**BROWN THRASHER** (*Toxostoma rufum*) – Especially common in the Blue Grass Valley—at least if you were in the lead van!

*Sturnidae (Starlings)*

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

*Bombycillidae (Waxwings)*

**CEDAR WAXWING** (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Daily.

*Parulidae (New World Warblers)*

**OVENBIRD** (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – The first, phylogenetically speaking, of 25 species of warblers seen on our tour! We had nice views of this ground-dwelling species, high on horizontal limbs, walking along as it sang!

**WORM-EATING WARBLER** (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) – Seen in the Blue Ridge our first full day.

**LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia motacilla*) – Seen best along Old House Run where we had a couple of picnic breakfasts.

**NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – Two seen in Blister Swamp among the dead trees and rhododendrons. This is as far south as this northern warbler breeds.

**GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER** (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) – Two handsome males seen in Highland County, one at Bramble Hill, the other on adjoining land from the road. Both birds were carrying food to feed either the female on the nest or nestlings. We also saw a hybrid "Brewster's" Warbler at Bramble Hill. [N]

**BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** (*Mniotilta varia*) – Great views of this unusual warbler.

**PROTHONOTARY WARBLER** (*Protonotaria citrea*) – Superb encounters on the banks of the James River our first afternoon. What a beauty!

**MOURNING WARBLER** (*Geothlypis philadelphia*) – Fine views of at least three males, the first at a highland swamp in Pocahontas County, WV, the spot where we had our first Alder Flycatcher.

**KENTUCKY WARBLER** (*Geothlypis formosa*) – A beautiful male seen after lunch along the Blue Ridge Parkway. This was a lifer for the Bishops, their only lifer of the trip. Notice the new genus in which this species, along with the Mourning, now resides.

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Seen and heard numerous times.

**HOODED WARBLER** (*Setophaga citrina*) – Good views of lovely males along the Blue Ridge; not surprisingly, we caught sight of precious few females of any Parulids, most of which were no doubt on nests.

**AMERICAN REDSTART** (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Seen quite a few times; this species, heretofore representative of a monotypic genus, has given its generic name to all the formerly classified *Dendroica*s due to nomenclatural priority when the genera were recently merged.

**CERULEAN WARBLER** (*Setophaga cerulea*) – A fabulous warbler, seen very well along the Blue Ridge; we all noted its characteristically short tail.

**NORTHERN PARULA** (*Setophaga americana*) – Seen especially well at the Science Camp; this species, formerly a member of the genus *Parula*, is now classified with *Setophaga*.

**MAGNOLIA WARBLER** (*Setophaga magnolia*) – One of the prettiest of the warblers; seen well in the conifers at higher elevations.

**BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER** (*Setophaga fusca*) – Magnificent—well, they all are! Fine views above the parking lot at Ramsey's Draft and at the Science Camp.

**YELLOW WARBLER** (*Setophaga petechia*) – Seen best along the Greenbrier River where we had the Willow Flycatchers. A handsome bird!

**CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER** (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) – Beautiful males along FR 14 in Pocahontas County, WV, and in Highland County, VA, at Bramble Hill.

**BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** (*Setophaga caerulescens cairnsi*) – Good views of males at Gaudineer Knob and at the Virgin Spruce trailhead.

**PINE WARBLER** (*Setophaga pinus*) – Good looks our first afternoon in the pines near Scottsville.

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE)** (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – Southernmost site for this northern breeder are the spruce of Highland and Pocahontas counties. Our best looks came at Gaudineer Knob.

**YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER (YELLOW-LORED)** (*Setophaga dominica dominica*) – A fine male in the sycamores along the James River our first afternoon.

**PRAIRIE WARBLER** (*Setophaga discolor*) – Our first warbler of the trip, a male along Hwy 20 en route to Scottsville; and the Bishops arrived just in time to enjoy it.

**BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER** (*Setophaga virens*) – Several seen along FR 14, mostly in the mixed

hardwood-conifer forest.

**CANADA WARBLER** (*Cardellina canadensis*) – A stunning male along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

*Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)*

**EASTERN TOWHEE** (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*)

**CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*)

**FIELD SPARROW** (*Spizella pusilla*)

**SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*)

**SWAMP SPARROW** (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Seen nicely in the big alder swamp along the Little River.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED)** (*Junco hyemalis carolinensis*) – Nice looks at this large race. [N]

*Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)*

**SUMMER TANAGER** (*Piranga rubra*) – A jubilant male seen at Monticello by those who visited Jefferson's home Wednesday morning.

**SCARLET TANAGER** (*Piranga olivacea*) – Jolting good views along the Blue Ridge Parkway; also seen elsewhere, including the Science Camp.

**NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) [N]

**ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK** (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – Flashy males seen at Bramble Hill.

**INDIGO BUNTING** (*Passerina cyanea*) – Abundant in most areas, excepting the highest elevations.

*Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)*

**BOBOLINK** (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – Another fabulous North American breeder! Seen very well delivering its complex, bubbling song in flight and from the fence in the Blue Grass Valley.

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Plentiful.

**EASTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella magna*) – Fine song!

**COMMON GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus quiscula*)

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*)

**ORCHARD ORIOLE** (*Icterus spurius*) – Seen the first afternoon along the James River.

**BALTIMORE ORIOLE** (*Icterus galbula*) – Heard along the James; seen in the Blue Grass Valley where we had the Pileated flybys.

*Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)*

**PURPLE FINCH** (*Carpodacus purpureus*) – Seen by part of the group in the Virgin Spruce area and at Blister Swamp.

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) – Seen in the Blue Grass Valley.

**PINE SISKIN** (*Spinus pinus*) – A group of six seen feeding on spruce cones at Gaudineer Knob.

**AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus tristis*) – Seen daily beautifying the landscape.

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) [E]

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## MAMMALS

**EASTERN COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

**SNOWSHOE HARE** (*Lepus americanus*) – What a surprise! Great looks at one at Gaudineer Knob. In winter this hare is entirely white.

**PLAIN EASTERN CHIPMUNK** (*Tamias striatus*)

**WOODCHUCK** (*Marmota monax*)

**EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

**FOX SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus niger*) – Seen only in the Blue Grass Valley.

**RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – A harbinger of the conifers.

**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Common.

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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**Totals for the tour: 114 bird taxa and 8 mammal taxa**