

Activities Descriptions

Directions to all field trip locations will be provided in the packet that you receive at check-in. Thanks to suggestions from former participants and guides we have made some changes in this year's trips and added a new trip. We think the result is an even richer variety of activities for you to choose from. All will be led by birders or naturalists that are knowledgeable about their subject and enthusiastic about sharing this knowledge. A complete list of field trip leaders will also be included in your packet at check-in. They will be updated on the website as they are confirmed. Trips that do not have enough participants will be cancelled and you will have the opportunity to join another trip. Cancellations will be posted on the ticket board located at the Activities Barn and also on the website. Cancellations will not be made until the latest possible time so check 48 hours before your trip. The time listed for the trips is the estimated time from departure at Mountain Lake until your return. We hope that the following descriptions will help you to select your trips.

Raft Trips: *4 Hours - Limit 10 - No Experience needed*

This is your chance to take a trip down the historic New River with no experience required. Each raft will have a guide on board to identify the birds and wildlife along the way. Be prepared to get a little wet though and don't forget the sunscreen. You will be escorted by expert river guides and a birding/nature guide (one for each raft) to help you identify wildlife as you go. A bus will leave Mt. Lake Hotel for all raft trips. For the most part, this is a sit back and bird experience but in case of a headwind, be prepared to pick up a paddle and help out.

#1 The Eggleston Cliffs Raft Trip:

Leader: Fri. Suzie Leslie Sat. Suzie Leslie

This trip will begin at the Eggleston Bridge and float past one of the most scenic sections of the New River with breathtaking views of the cliffs and rock formations with the take out at the dramatic Castle Rocks in Pembroke. You will begin by birding the outfitter's grounds along the river. Birds likely encountered along the way are yellow-throated and yellow warblers, parula warbler, great blue and green herons, belted kingfisher, Baltimore oriole, eastern kingbird, and osprey. Ravens can also be heard calling about the cliffs.

#2: Castle Rocks to Ripplemead Raft Trip:

Leaders: Fri. Bill Opengari Sat. Bill Opengari –

This float that begins at Castle Rocks in Pembroke and takes out at Ripplemead provides you with the opportunity to get out and explore the shoreline as you go. Your guide will point out the birds and songs along the way. Birds to expect are parula warbler, yellow-throated warbler, indigo bunting, orchard oriole, Baltimore oriole, eastern kingbird, yellow-throated vireo, great blue and green herons, belted kingfisher and osprey. You will also have a chance for some field birds as you walk along the edging areas beside the river.

#3 Glen Alton Hike: *Bus trip - Easy Hiking -1.5 mi.- 5 Hours - Limit 15*

Leaders: Fri. David Spears –Sat. TBA

A bus will leave from Mt. Lake Hotel for all Glen Alton trips. Bring along plenty of water. Waterproof shoes are good when there has been a lot of rain. This 304 acre preserve was originally a privately owned hunting camp and summer retreat. It was sold to the Forest Service in 1999 and has been open to the public since that time. The area around the lodge and caretaker house is dotted with fruit trees and grape arbors. A level loop trail passes through a mixed forest, turns along a grassy area and then circles crossing on a boardwalk between a wet area and Big Stony Creek. There are also a number of ponds on the site. This habitat diversity provides excellent birding and butterflying. At just over 2600' elevation, there have been a surprising number of high elevation species documented as breeding on the property. Target species include blackburnian warbler, ovenbird, black-throated blue warbler, brown creeper, winter wren, blue-headed vireo, tree swallows, wood duck, eastern bluebird and red-shouldered hawk.

#4 Cascades: *Bus Trip - Difficult hiking by flatland standards - 5 Hours - 4mi. - Limit 15*

Leaders: Sat. TBA

A bus will leave from Mt. Lake Hotel for all Cascades trips. Bring plenty of water. You will want your camera along for this one too.

A scenic trail ascends for 2 miles along Little Stony Creek affording enchanted views of the creek as it cascades down over picturesque rock formations and through rhododendron thickets. You will be rewarded for your climb by a spectacular view of a 66 foot waterfall. Birds to look for are Louisiana waterthrush, black-throated blue warbler, American redstart and wood thrush. You will want to check out the wildflower garden beside the bathrooms. The host of flowers attracts an array of nectaring butterflies and an occasional hummingbird.

#5 Pandapas Pond: *Bus Trip - Easy Hiking - 1 Mi.-3 1/2 Hours (3 hours Sat.) - Limit 15*

Leaders: **Fri. John Kell Sat. John Kell Sun. John Kell**

A bus will leave from Mt. Lake Hotel for all Pandapas Pond trips. Bring water and a snack if desired.

A loop trail will take you around the 8 acre pond and through the surrounding Appalachian hardwoods, pines, and rhododendron thickets. This is a good place to find hooded and pine warblers, Louisiana waterthrush, blue-gray gnatcatchers, swamp sparrows, phoebes, woodpeckers, and green herons. The pond often attracts an unexpected avian visitor.

#6 Doe Run: *Car Pool – 4Hours - Limit 15*

Leader: **Sat. Bill Opengari- Sun. Bill Opengari -**

This trip will leave from Mt. Lake by carpool and bird down the mountain stopping at pull offs along the way. As you go down, you will be looking for cerulean and hooded warblers. Further down you will stop to search for chats, golden-winged warblers, and prairie warblers. When you reach the bottom of the mountain, you will stop at a boat landing on the New River then continue on to a second growth area where you will walk a well mowed trail. This covers a wide variety of habitat and you can expect field and riparian species as well as the second growth species such as willow flycatchers with their distinctive song and white-eyed vireos. Yellow-breasted chats may entertain you with their clown flight over the shrubs and house wrens sing endlessly without seeming to catch their breath.

#7 Lake Walk 1: Beginning Birding *Easy Hiking- 1/2Mile- 2 Hours - Limit 15*

Leaders: **Sue & Randy Thrasher**

This walk will meet in front of the hotel and is for Beginning Birders (others are welcome). It will start with a brief how-to on binocular use and the art of locating a bird with tips on identifying along the way. You will walk the road leading away from the hotel which is bordered by rhododendron, hardwoods and hemlocks (many that have been treated for the wooly adelgid). The circling barn swallows are sure to put on a show to start the trip. As you walk along the road you will have one of the best chances of finding Canada and black-throated blue warblers, rose-breasted grosbeak, scarlet tanager, least flycatcher, and blue-headed vireo.

#8 Blueberry Ridge Walk: *Moderately Strenuous Walking - 1 Mile – 2 1/2 Hours - Limit 15*

Leaders: **Tim & Alyce Quinn**

This walk will meet in front of the hotel and proceed up a gradual hill through the woods to an open area with a picturesque view of the hotel. Target species include least flycatcher, wood thrush, rose-breasted grosbeak, scarlet tanager, blue-headed vireo, eastern towhee, chestnut-sided warbler, black and white warbler and a chance for golden-wing warbler. Don't forget to look up for a glimpse of a soaring hawk. We will also be listening for the ethereal song of the veery.

#9 Lake Walk Trail: *Level walking with challenging footing at times – 1 _ miles- 2 Hours – Limit 15*

Leaders: **Fri. TBA Sat. David Spears Sun. Sue & Randy Thrasher**

This trail follows the lake winding through the rhododendrons and beside picturesque rock formations. It offers one of the best locations for Canada warblers, black-throated blue and black-throated green warblers, rose-breasted grosbeak and solitary vireos.

Be sure to wear hiking boots or sturdy shoes that provide support.

10 Poverty Hollow Driving Trip: *Car Pool - 4 Hours – Limit 15*

Leaders: **Bill Akers & James Hartley**

This trip will leave from Mt. Lake Hotel. There may be a stop on the way off of the mountain if golden-wings or ceruleans have been found on a previous trip. You will proceed along Poverty Hollow where you will be listening for the jip-jip of red crossbills. This drive runs along a wooded ridge, drops down into farmland and ends at the New River. It provides an opportunity to find a variety of species from hooded warblers and ovenbirds to field bird and water birds.

#11 Biology Station: *Car Pool- Easy walking- 2 _ Hours*

Leaders: **Fri. Jerry Via Sat. Jerry Via & Suzie Leslie**

You will begin by carpool in front of the hotel and drive around the lake to the Biology Station with stops along the way. Birds likely encountered along the way are veery, scarlet tanagers, rose-breasted grosbeak and Canada warbler. Once at the station you will spend time walking the grounds and surrounding trails. This is one of the best areas to spot the flame-colored throat of the Blackburnian warbler. There is a pond with surrounding brushy fields which provide a variety of habitat.

#12 Bald Knob: *Moderately Strenuous Walk - 1 _ Miles – 3 Hours (2 _ on Sunday) - Limit 15*

Leaders: **Fri. TBA Sat. TBA Sun. TBA**

Both a trail and a road lead up to this thrilling overlook. Your leader will select the route that is most likely to produce good birds. Dark-eyed juncos, least flycatchers, chestnut-sided warblers, American redstarts, and nesting sapsuckers are all common along this trail. Once at the top, you can choose a boulder, sit and watch soaring red-tailed hawks and playful ravens with vistas all of the way to West Virginia. This is always a favorite. Wear sturdy shoes and bring water and a camera!

#13 Clover Hollow Christmas Tree Farm: *Bus Trip - Moderate Hiking- 1 Mile- 3 _ Hours - Limit 20*

Leaders: Saturday morning & Sunday morning, Tom Brobson and David Brady

This privately owned, organic tree farm is set on a hillside with surrounding woods, wet and brushy areas and open fields. The owners will be your guides as you explore the diverse habitat. Their knowledge of the land and their devotion to its preservation make for an interesting experience in itself. The farm is a haven for butterflies as well as birds. Expect to find eastern bluebirds, meadowlark, field sparrows, prairie warblers, scarlet tanagers, hummingbirds, and a possible loggerhead shrike. Soaring hawks are a frequent sight.

#14 Palisades: *Moderate Walking- 3 1/2 Hours- Limit 15*

Leaders: Pat West

This is privately owned land with a most spectacular view of the New River and the majestic rock cliffs known as the Palisades. Offering a blend of birds, scenery and art, participants on this trip will be guests of Pat West, a well-known and popular Giles County artist. The birding walk will explore fields, woods, and the river's edge. Some of the birds that you can expect to see are wild turkeys, meadow larks, bluebirds, a variety of warblers, orioles, kingbirds, great blue herons, and raptors including osprey and a possible bald eagle. After the walk, there will be time to view Pat's work in her gallery and even purchase a picture that captures your imagination. Pat started building her house in 1986 and it is an ongoing work of art with its glass, field stones and wood. She enjoys refining the rolling landscape that falls away down to the New River, then trying to catch it all up in a painting. Closer to the house, art and gardens get all tangled together. Her new paintings are oil paint on glitter on canvas. The sculptures are made from whatever gets in her way when she is working.

#15 Wildflower Walk: *Easy Walking – 4 Hours - Limit 15*

Leaders: TBA

The bus will leave from Mt. Lake Hotel and travel to Glen Alton. The trails around Glen Alton run through fields, meadows, and woods and around wet areas. This provides an opportunity to see a wide variety of plants while you enjoy the scenic farm. In addition to the wildflowers, you will have a chance to see many of the birds that the earlier groups have located.

#16 Digiscoping: *Workshop- 1 Hour – Limit 15*

An expert from an optic company will instruct in ways on using this popular new method of increasing the power of your digital camera and answer questions on the equipment needed to digiscope.

#17 Butterfly/Dragonfly Walk: *Bus Trip – 5 Hours –moderate walking 1.5 mi. - Limit 15*

Leaders: Fri. Teta Kain

This trip will share a bus with the Glen Alton group. The bus will leave from Mt. Lake Hotel. There are meadows, ponds and wet areas to explore along with an abundance of wildflowers. Butterfly and dragonfly watching are two of the fastest growing nature hobbies and your guides are not only experts on the butterflies and dragon flies, they are also avid photographers so bring your camera and get some tips on photographing these colorful insects.

#18 Geology Walk: *Easy Walking - 1 Hour - Limit 15*

Leader: David Spears

David Spears is a professional geologist and amateur birder who lives near the center of Virginia in Buckingham County. David started watching birds and picking up rocks as a youngster in New Jersey. He began birding seriously while at Virginia Tech in the early 1980s, participating in the 1983 Giles County foray, his first VSO activity. David is the current President of the VSO.

Mountain Lake is a unique geological phenomenon, being one of only two natural lakes in Virginia and the only natural lake in the southern Appalachians. Its origin is the source of much speculation. On this one-hour walk, we'll examine the visible evidence for the origin of the lake and discuss the series of geologic events that led to its formation, from the deposition of the surrounding bedrock 400 million years ago to landscape-changing forces during the last Ice Age. We might even see some birds!

New #19 Radford Arsenal: *Birding by mini bus with numerous birding stops – 5 Hours – Limit 12*

Leader: Len Diioia

The managed grassland and wooded patches that we will be birding are located at the Dublin Facility of the Arsenal. It has been designated an Important Bird Area (IBA) and the New River Valley Bird Club is assisting in bird and butterfly surveys. Admittance to this property is restricted and we have special permission to bird this land. We will be provided an escort, Len Diioia, from the facility. Everyone will leave by mini bus from the hotel and travel to the Radford Property where we will meet Len. From there we will travel in their van to the Dublin site. The trip will cover most of this property in their van with frequent stops to get out and bird. You can expect good numbers of meadowlark, bobwhite, grasshopper sparrow and wild turkey. Other species present in smaller numbers are blue grosbeak, yellow-breasted chat, and prairie warbler. There is the possibility for Henslow's Sparrow and brown-headed nuthatch as well. This will be on a first come, first serve basis and all participants will need to give their name as it appears on their driver's license and bring the license with them to the field trip.