



Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Southern Appalachian Naturalist Certification Program: Birds of the Smokies! Many of you are returning for another program and we hope this will be one of many weekends we will spend together learning naturalist skills and gaining knowledge about the Great Smoky Mountains.

This weekend we will focus on the avifauna of the southern Appalachians. The diversity of vegetation types and physical characteristics of these mountains promote a species-rich bird community. By the end of the weekend our heads will be abuzz with birdsong and our eyes grown accustomed to searching out birds in forest and field. We will learn their habits, habitats, and physical and behavioral characteristics that help in their identification.

Get ready! You have registered for an intense weekend during which we will cover material and skills that most people receive in a semester-long class. If you think this sounds ambitious, you are right! In order to accomplish our goals it is necessary for you to do some homework, in the form of readings, to give you the background information needed to take part in discussions and build your toolkit of skills. See Readings and Homework below. We will do our best to keep lecture time to a minimum and actually work on learning skills and practicing them in the field.

**Instructors:**

I will be one of your instructors for the course. I earned my BS in Wildlife Science from Virginia Tech in 2003 and my MS, also in Wildlife Science, from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 2008. My graduate research was part of a multi-state effort to assess the effects of forest management on Cerulean Warblers. I became quite addicted to Cerulean Warblers and continued to follow them to all parts of their global range. Ironically, I now live in the shadow of Cerulean Knob, just outside the park!

Our other instructor for this course is Tremont Program Specialist, **Logan Rosenberg:** He earned his undergraduate degrees in English Literature and French Language from Saint Mary's College of Maryland in 2006 and his graduate degree in Environmental Education from Prescott College in 2012. His graduate research was on using the learning of naturalist skills (like birding!) to enhance a sense of place in students. He particularly loves to bird by ear and decode the language and interactions of birds.

**Arrival and Departure:**

Plan to arrive at Tremont on Friday between 3:00 and 5:00 pm, giving you an opportunity to move into the dorm and meet other participants before our 6:00 pm evening meal. There will be an optional session to learn about binoculars from 5:30-5:50 pm in the Pavilion. The program will end around 3 pm on Sunday.

**Weather:**

It may help you to know that over the past 25 years the average daily high temperature for this weekend in May was 77°F and the average daily low was 50°F here in Walker Valley. Come prepared with layers for cool early mornings and warmer afternoons. Rain gear is always necessary here in the Smoky Mountains, so please plan to bring it along on our walks.

**Logistics:**

Please read the “Your Visit to Tremont” link for important packing information. Along with your readings, linens and toiletries, you may want to bring a mattress pad to ease the firm mattress and perhaps a bedside lamp if you are a late-night reader. Please bring binoculars if you own a pair. If you don’t own any we have several pairs to loan. Also bring a notepad and pencil and any field guides you like. Sturdy walking shoes/boots, outdoor clothing, and a hat are also important for your comfort.

**Health & Waiver Form:**

Please fill out the Health/Waiver Form and bring it with you to turn in upon check-in. If you have special needs, dietary (go to <http://www.gsmit.org/Food.html> for more specifics), medical, or otherwise, please send in your form ahead of time. It will be challenging to accommodate special dietary needs if they are not communicated to us in advance. This form must be filled out and turned in to us for you to participate in the program. Please note that food is not allowed in the dorm.

We hope that this information is helpful to you in planning for your upcoming visit to Tremont. Please tell a friend about us so that they too can learn about the wonders of the Smokies. If you have further questions, please feel free to call.

Let's go birding!



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**Readings and Homework:**

Please be sure to read the homework that will be emailed to you after you register. These readings discuss such subjects as Neotropical migrants, bird conservation, territoriality, and more. We will refer to these readings throughout the weekend. It's important that you read and reflect on them in order to prepare for this class, so please read them all prior to coming!

In the meantime you can do the following:

**Begin to tune your ears to bird song.**

You can do this by simply spending some time each day in your backyard or nearby natural area. Begin by listening to the birdsong around you and trying to pick out the different types of songs. Listen for pitch, tone, quality, and repetition. The more you do this, the better you will become. Many of us can identify the "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" of a Carolina Chickadee or the raucous "Caw!" of the American Crow. See if you can also hear the "Peter, Peter" of the Tufted Titmouse or the "teakettle, teakettle, teakettle" of a Carolina Wren.

Don't worry! You won't be expected to memorize every birdsong we hear throughout the weekend. However, you will find birding-by-ear easier if you have begun to hear differences between some bird songs.

**Begin to see different bird characteristics.**

Spend time looking at birds at your feeder, in the yard, while you are driving, etc. Concentrate on the particular characteristics that stand out on each bird. What makes that bird unique? Perhaps it is the large size and glossy black feathers on an American Crow or the slightly de-curved bill and bright white stripe over a Carolina Wren's eye. Learning to "see" bird characteristics will help you as you begin to study them in earnest.

**Specials just for YOU...**

You will receive a copy of *Birds of the Smokies* during the weekend. Also, during the weekend, you will receive a 15% discount on any merchandise you purchase from our gift shop - this is a great deal!