

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the **Southern Appalachian Naturalist Certification Program: Birds of the Smokies!** Whether this is your first or eighth course, we hope this is one of many weekends we'll learn and practice naturalist skills together in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. **Please read this letter in full, as it contains essential information for your visit to Tremont.**

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 most people receive in a semester-long class. If you think this sounds ambitious, you are right! To accomplish our goals, you must do some homework in the form of readings, which will give you the background information needed to participate in discussions and build your naturalist toolkit. Lecture time will be kept to a minimum so we can learn and practice these skills.

Instructor:

I am pleased to be your instructor for this workshop. My graduate research focused on naturalist skills acquisition (such as birding!) to enhance a sense of place in students. I particularly love to bird by ear and decode the “language” and interactions of birds. Visit our website to learn more about me and the rest of our [faculty and staff](#).

Arrival and Departure:

Plan to arrive at Tremont on Friday between 4:00 and 5:00 pm to have enough time to move into the dorm and meet other participants before our 6:00 pm evening meal. Check-in will be at the Visitor Center. If arriving after 5:00 pm, after crossing the bridge, pass the office on your left, continue past the wooden stop sign, pass the field on your right, and then take a left up the steep gravel driveway between the Pavilion and the Dining Hall. The program will end around 3:00 pm on Sunday.

[View the full course schedule here.](#)

Parking Passes

Valid parking tags are required on any vehicles parking for longer than 15 minutes inside Great Smoky Mountains National Park as part of the Park it Forward program; this includes when parked at Tremont. **Please purchase your parking tag in advance, not when you arrive.** Click here to [purchase your daily or weekly pass online](#). All revenue will stay in the park to provide sustainable, year-round support focusing on improving the visitor experience, protecting resources, and maintaining trails, roads, historic structures, and facilities. [Learn more about Park it Forward.](#)

Weather – Being Prepared:

The weather here is usually pleasant in April. Over the past five years, the average daily high for April was 74° F. and the average daily low was 42° F. here in Walker Valley. Bring a raincoat! The Smokies are a very wet and humid climate and you can *expect precipitation in one form or another* at some point during your stay here.

Logistics:

Please read our [latest COVID-19 guidelines](#) prior to your trip and let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

Please read the “[Your Visit to Tremont](#)” document for important packing information. Along with your linens and toiletries, you may want to bring a mattress pad to ease the firm mattress, plus a bedside light or headlamp if you are a late-night reader. If you’d like to bring a camp chair for the outdoor classroom, you may find that more comfortable than the provided benches.

Bring binoculars if you own a pair. If you don’t own any, we have a limited number of 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 a must for personal comfort.

Wifi is available in the Activity Center, but we invite and encourage you to unplug for the weekend. Learn more about our [food](#) and [facilities](#). Please note that food is not allowed in the dorm.

Preparation:

Please read the following materials ahead of time — doing so is crucial to helping you understand much of the material covered during the course.

- [Violet-Green Swallow chapter from *The Animal Dialogues* by Craig Childs](#)
- [Selections from *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold](#)

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 for 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.

Last but Not Least...

We offer a 15% discount to all program participants in our Visitor's Center during the workshop.

Please note that the store will only be open on arrival day.

I hope that this information is helpful to you in planning for your upcoming visit to Tremont. If you have further questions, please feel free to call or email.

Sincerely,

Logan Rosenberg
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