



Tico Tours

Wood Warblers and other Neo-tropical birds of Eastern North America

Duration- 7 Days

Expect 150+ Species

ITINERARY:

Day 1 - Arrive Norfolk International Airport and transfer to hotel. Depending on time of arrival, we should have time to look around the area for *Boat-tailed* and *Common Grackle*, *Laughing*, *Herring*, and *Ring-billed Gulls*, *Osprey*, *Double-crested Cormorant*, *Brown Pelican*, *Great Blue Heron*, *Snowy* and *Great Egret*.

Night Hampton Inn-Norfolk Airport

Day 2 - After a quick breakfast, we will pack the van and head towards the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The Great Dismal Swamp is located in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. The refuge consists of over 111,000 acres of forested wetlands. Lake Drummond, a 3,100-acre natural lake, is located in the heart of the swamp. Over two hundred species of birds have been identified on the refuge since its establishment; ninety-six of these species have been reported as nesting on or near the refuge. Birding is best during spring migration from April to June when the greatest diversity of species (particularly warblers) occurs. Two southern species, the *Swainson's Warbler* and *Wayne's (Black-throated Green) Warbler* are not uncommon in the Great Dismal Swamp. Other birds of interest are the *Prothonotary Warbler*, *Hooded Warbler*, *Great-crested Flycatcher*, *Red-shouldered Hawk*, *Yellow-billed Cuckoo*, *Wood Duck*, *Barred Owl*, and *Pileated Woodpecker*.

Following a delightful morning in “the swamp”, we will begin our journey westward towards the majestic Blue Ridge Mountains of western Virginia. We will make a brief detour to the Piney Grove Nature Preserve where we will look for the rare and endangered *Red-cockaded Woodpecker*. Other birds we should encounter here include *Summer Tanager*, *Common Yellowthroat*, and *Brown-headed Nuthatch*. Lunch will be at The Virginia Diner, a local landmark, where we will enjoy some traditional home cooked Southern Cuisine.

Our journey will take us through Virginia’s capital city, Richmond, on the edge of the coastal plain. From there we will continue our journey west through Virginia’s piedmont (literally “foot of the mountain”) geographical region. A few strategic stops through the piedmont should yield *Blue Grosbeak*, *Indigo Bunting*, *Yellow-breasted Chat*, *Prairie Warbler*, *White-eyed Vireo*, *Wilson’s Warbler*, and *Orchard Oriole* among others.

We should arrive in Charlottesville, the city Thomas Jefferson built and the home of the University of Virginia, in time to drive to the top of Observatory Hill on the campus of the university. Here with luck, we may encounter a large variety of migrants including *Black and White*, *Black-throated Blue*, *Black-throated Green*, *Cape May*, *Palm*, and *Tennessee Warbler*, *Red-eyed Vireo*, *Swainson’s Thrush*, and *Blue-gray Gnatcatcher*. Afterwards, we will head for our hotel, check-in, and wash-up for dinner.

Night in Charlottesville

Day 3 – Arising well before daybreak, we will grab a quick breakfast and hit the road again. Our destination this morning, some 2 hours south of Charlottesville, is the infamous “Warbler Road”. Appropriately named, from its intersection with the Blue Ridge Parkway at an elevation of 3548 feet, Warbler Road ends at the James River at an elevation of near 600 feet. The altitude drop, a total of 2700 feet, covers 13 miles of old-growth hardwood forests, hemlock-lined trout streams, open meadows and clearings, and pine stands. The variation of habitat and elevation make this site a particularly attractive birding venue. *It is possible to see over twenty species of wood warblers along this road.* At the higher elevations, nesting neo-tropical migrants include *Canada*, *Chestnut-sided*, *Black-throated Blue*, and *Blackburnian Warblers*, as well as *Veery*, *Rose-Breasted Grosbeak*, and *Ruffed Grouse*. Occasionally, *Least Flycatcher* and *Black-Billed Cuckoo* nest within these woodlands. Middle elevations can be very productive for *Cerulean* and *Worm-eating Warblers*. Hillside clearings can produce *Kentucky* and *Prairie Warblers*, *Yellow-breasted Chat*, and possibly *Golden-winged Warbler* and *Blue-winged Warblers*. At lower elevations, we will look for *Northern Parula* and *Black-Throated Green Warbler*. Spring migration is a

spectacular season to search for migrant passerines. In the spring, in addition to finding the plethora of nesting songbirds hoping to establish territories, we may spy *Blackpoll*, *Bay-breasted*, *Cape May*, and *Tennessee Warblers*. In the lowlands near the end of the road, we will enjoy a box lunch. Here, we should find nesting *Prothonotary Warbler* and *Louisiana Waterthrush*, as well as *Warbling*, *Yellow-throated*, *Blue-headed*, and *Red-eyed Vireo*, *Acadian Flycatcher*, *Baltimore Oriole*, and *American Goldfinch*. Other wildlife abounds in this remote area so we may see numerous white-tailed deer, the sly red fox, or a slithering black rat snake crossing the road.

We will spend the afternoon travelling northwest towards the Allegheny Highlands an area known as “Virginia’s Little Switzerland”. With the highest mean elevation of any county in Virginia, many sites offer habitat for birds more typical of northern climates. Our destination will be the gorgeous Highland Inn in the heart of this beautiful high mountain valley. The Highland Inn was built in 1904 to lodge tourists escaping from the summer heat of nearby cities. The grand Victorian structure has been restored to preserve its charm while providing necessary modern conveniences including 18 guest rooms with private bath. Dinner and breakfast are served in the classic Victorian dining room and the inn also has a casual tavern where we can unwind.

Night at Highland Inn, Monterey

Day 4 - After another early breakfast, we will set out in search of some of the specialty birds of this mountainous area. Our first destinations will be Paddy’s Knob. Located along the ridgeline that forms the West Virginia/Virginia border, Paddy Knob Lookout peaks at an elevation of 4477 feet. Surrounded by mature hardwood forests with a lush sassafras under-story, and blackberry-bush edges, this site is best known among birders for housing unusual breeding species in Virginia, such as *Mourning Warbler*, *Least Flycatcher*, *Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker*, and *Black-Billed Cuckoo*. Other breeding birds within these forests include *Dark-Eyed Junco*, *Cedar Waxwing*, *Veery*, *American Redstart*, *Black-throated Blue*, and *Black-throated Green Warblers*. *Ruffed Grouse* and *Wild Turkey* are numerous throughout. The abundance of sassafras attracts spicebush swallowtail, eastern tiger swallowtail, red admiral, great spangled fritillary, and pipevine swallowtail. Other wildlife encounters could include black bear, red fox, and numerous white-tailed deer.

From here, we will head for another unique area known as Locust Springs. Locust Springs Recreation Area is tucked away in a corner of Virginia so remote that we will have to enter West Virginia to reach it. The 9,900-acre Laurel Fork Special Management Area surrounding Locust Springs is part of the Potomac

Highlands, and Laurel Fork itself feeds the Potomac River. In this biological niche, one can find 25 species of flora and fauna that exist nowhere else in the "Old Dominion" (Virginia's nickname). A short walk through oak, maple and spruce forest to the beaver ponds should produce a number of breeding birds normally only found at more northern latitudes. Here we should see and hear *Hermit Thrush*, *Golden-crowned Kinglet*, *Magnolia Warbler*, *Yellow-rumped Warbler*, *Red-breasted Nuthatch*, *Brown Creeper*, *Yellow-bellied Sapsucker*, *Winter Wren*, *Purple Finch*, *Blackburnian Warbler*, *Black-throated Green Warbler*, *Least and Willow Flycatcher*, and we will hope for rarities including *Northern Goshawk*, *Alder and Olive-sided Flycatchers*, *Nashville Warbler*, and *Mourning Warbler*. Following our hike to the beaver ponds, we will enjoy a picnic lunch while listening to *Black-throated Blue* and *Black-throated Green Warblers*, *Red-eyed and Blue-headed Vireo*, and *Rose-breasted Grosbeak*. A few hours spent in this ethereal place will surely be one of the highlights of this tour.

Our route from Locust Springs back to the Highland Inn will take us along the Allegheny Road, which straddles the ridge here. Along the way, we may encounter *Ruffed Grouse*, *Wild Turkey*, *Veery*, *Scarlet Tanager*, *Canada, Kentucky, Hooded, Worm-eating, and Cerulean Warbler*, and *Least Flycatcher*. As the road descends into the Blue Grass Valley, we will look for *Red-headed Woodpecker*, *Vesper Sparrow*, *Savannah Sparrow*, *Common Raven*, *Golden-winged Warbler*, *Black-billed Cuckoo*, *Bobolink*, *Eastern Meadowlark*, *Barn and Cliff Swallow*, *House Wren*, *Bald Eagle*, and *Red-tailed Hawk*. From here we will head back to the Highland Inn to wash up for another wonderful home cooked meal. Afterwards, we may assemble in the tavern for libations and good conversation.

Night at Highland Inn, Monterey

Day 5 – Today we will arise a little bit later and enjoy a leisurely breakfast before heading back into the Blue Grass Valley where we will look for any birds we may have missed on the previous afternoon. We may also visit some of the local Maple Syrup farms to see how this wonderful syrup is produced. You may even buy some syrup or maple sugar candy to take along or give to friends back home. We will have lunch at the High's Restaurant another local landmark known for its friendly hometown atmosphere and delicious home baked pies. Side trips to several nearby areas will give us an opportunity to see some of the more common and widespread bird species including *Green-backed Heron*, *Prairie Warbler*, *Field Sparrow*, *Northern Cardinal*, *Northern Mockingbird*, *Song Sparrow*, *American Crow*, *Rufous-sided Towhee*, *Chimney Swift*, *Ruby-throated Hummingbird*, *White-breasted Nuthatch*, *Black-capped Chickadee*, *Tufted Titmouse*, and *Eastern Bluebird*.

Night at Highland Inn, Monterey

Day 6 – After an early breakfast, we will head back east leaving this beautiful and unique area behind with many fond memories. Our journey today will take us over the mountains and back down into the Shenandoah Valley. We will make a few stops along the way to catch some migrants we may not have yet encountered. Our route will take us back through Thomas Jefferson’s beloved Charlottesville on our way east towards Richmond where we will stop for lunch. After lunch, we will head southeast towards the southside city of Emporia. The area just south of Emporia along the Virginia-North Carolina border presents us with an opportunity to see several species of birds which are at the northern edge of their breeding range. Here we should have great looks at *Mississippi Kite* and will hope to find such rarities as *Swainson’s Warbler*, *Bachman’s Sparrow*, *Northern Waterthrush*, and *Anhinga*. More common and widespread species we should find with ease include *Downy and Red-bellied Woodpecker*, *White-eyed Vireo*, *White-breasted Nuthatch*, *Prothonotary Warbler*, *Hooded Warbler*, *Pine Warbler*, and *Prairie Warbler*, *Northern Rough-winged Swallow*, *Yellow Warbler*, *Common Yellowthroat*, and *Yellow-breasted Chat*. We will depart southside in the late afternoon and head back to the Norfolk area.

Night at Hampton Inn, Norfolk Airport

Day 7- Depart for home or continue on coastal birding extension.