Birding Guide to South Mountain

Driving along the roads of the Michaux State Forest in June, you can hear bird songs drifting out from the interior forests. The singing birds are secretive species that require large blocks of mountain woodlands to breed like the Wood Thrush, Veery, or Ovenbird. Or, walking the trails, you may catch a glimpse of the vibrant yellow and black of a Hooded Warbler or the startling crimson of the Scarlet Tanager. You may hear the distant call of the large Pileated Woodpecker.

Though the high breeding densities of these "core-forest" species is the reason South Mountain was designated as one of the Audubon Society's "Important Bird Areas" of Pennsylvania, there are a great diversity of other types of ecosystems throughout the South Mountain area that offer a wonderful array of birdwatching in brushy, field, wetland or open-water habitats.

There are always birds to watch somewhere in South Mountain any time of the year!

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1. Boiling Springs Lake
Children’s Lake in downtown Boiling Springs is a large, spring-fed lake, that stays open year-round for resident and migrant waterfowl. A healthy flock of resident domestic and cross-bred ducks and geese are present, as are a few Muscovy Swans and seasonal migrating visitors. Trees surrounding the lake are also used by many species of songbirds for nesting and during migration. The Appalachian Trail runs along the lake through the town, and makes for a convenient and diverse habitat walk south past historic furnace remains, through a small riparian woodlands, and through farm lands.

2. Mount Holly Marsh Preserve
This site is a matrix of wetland, meadow, and upland forest habitats with trails winding throughout. Geese, numerous species of ducks and herons, Belted Kingfisher, and American Woodcock are common. Raptors include Red-shouldered Hawk and an occasional Harrier. For more information and a trail map:
www.ccpa.net/index.aspx?NID=3650

3. King’s Gap Env. Education Center
16 miles of numerous trails wind through more than 1,400 acres and many diverse habitats. A great place to see all the species of woodpeckers, as well as most of the species of birds that pass through or nest in the forests of South Mountain. Wood Thrushes and Scarlet Tanagers abound. Download their Recreational Guide trails map as well as the Common Birds guide from their maps page. www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/findpark/kingsgap/index.htm

4. Huntsdale Fish Hatchery
The historic part of the hatchery has abandoned ponds lined with tall trees, attracting a wide variety of water and riparian species. Dabbbling ducks are common, and Wood Ducks nest here. Black-crowned Night-Heron are found roosting in spring and early summer. In migration, look for rails, American Bittern, Osprey, and swallows. It is also a reliable location for Rusty Blackbird in spring. SR 233 to Pine Rd., east to Sheaffer Drive. The current operating hatchery will be on the left. Park on right, and walk around Hidden Pond and wetland areas on the east side of Sheaffer Drive.

5. Pine Grove Furnace State Park
A variety of habitats are found here, from streamside forests to lakes to wet woods, to hemlock groves. Find Neotropical migrants, including thrushes, warblers and tanagers, along the rail-trail in the Laurel Lake area. The lakes are a magnet for waterfowl and wading birds. Winter birding is good here due to the conifers; look for winter finches, crossbills, and six species of woodpeckers. Download a park map for parking and trail options:
www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/findpark/pinegrovefurnace/

6. Camp Michaux
At the intersection of Michaux and Bunker Hill roads are the historic remains of a variety of buildings spanning nearly 200 years. Clearings and trails criss-cross this area providing a variety of edge habitat mixed with streams and conifer forests, resulting in a high variety of bird species. Walk the A.T. here, or download a detailed “walking tour” map:

7. Big Flat
Use Appalachian Trail parking lot along Shipensburg Road. Walk around perimeter of parking lot for open brushy species like Eastern Towhee, American Goldfinch, and Grey Catbird; or walk the A.T. in either direction for forest birds like chickadees, peweews, or tanagers. Toilet facilities are a half mile south on Shipensburg Road at the Recreation Area.

8. Thompson Hollow Road
Half way between Shipensburg and Whither road is a timber cut on the south side of Thompson Hollow Road. Look for Baltimore Orioles and Red-headed Woodpeckers. Pines are attracting a wide assortment of birds.

9. Milesburn Road
Following Burd Run, this stretch of Milesburn Road is a good place to see or hear warblers in spring and fall. Two pull off areas by gates are safe places to park.

10. Flatrock Plantation
A large burn area is slowly growing back on the west side of Milesburn Road at the intersection of Ridge Road. Old field and scrub species abound, along with Common Nighthawks, raptors and songbird migrants. Look for the yellow gate in the deer exclusion fence to get inside.

11. Long Pine Run Reservoir (Rec. Area)
March and November is the best time to see migrating ducks, geese, and other water birds. In the summer, look for an occasional loon, along with herons, several species of swallows, and Red-shouldered Hawks. Osprey and eagles occasionally appear looking for fish. Trails circle the lake.

12. Old Chambersburg Reservoir
Along 233, this drained reservoir is in the early stages of regrowth, with tree seedlings planted along restored creek. Old field and meadow species abound here, including Field Sparrow, Goldfinch, and Tree Swallow. Park alongside 233 at a pull-off by the bridge over Long Pine Run and follow a scenic, unimproved trail through a hemlock grove to the old reservoir area.

13. Quarry Gap Road
Bordering the northeast side of Caledonia State Park and following Hosack Run, Quarry Gap Road is a great place to see and hear Wood Thrush and Veery, as well as other thrushes during migration. Due to the wet forest area, other Neotropical songbirds abound.

14. Caledonia State Park
With 12 different trails adding up to 10 miles of hiking, you can choose very easy to more difficult terrain. Streams, ponds, and varying forest types offer a great variety of birds any time of the year. A trail guide is available at the park office. Download a park map for information and trails:
www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/findpark/caledonia/#eduction

15. New Baltimore Road Recreation Area
Parking area close to Route 30 for several trail loops through mixed open and forest habitat. Kiosk signs show trails that are good for general birding year round. Toilet facilities nearby at Caledonia State Park office.

16. Irishtown Road
The north half of the road borders the Mt. Cydonia Ponds Natural Area, where birches is restricted to the road only due to the many protected vernal ponds. This is a great stretch for all-around spring and fall migrants, including Louisiana Waterthrush, Kentucky and other warblers, many species of Neotropical songbirds.

17. Mt. Alto State Park
A small park with one, short forested trail. Picnic and toilet facilities.

18. Old Forge Picnic Area
Open picnic area along Tumbling Run and the Appalachian Trail. This wet forest area is attractive to a high diversity of birds and creek-side trails make it a great place for birding. Toilet facilities are available.

19. Gum Springs Road
The combination of open fields and wet areas make an attractive habitat for American Woodcock. To watch the courtship display of males in March, park on north end of Gum Springs Road, Walk down road across stream and pipeline to large open area. Woodcocks are mostly actively displaying dusk-to-dusk.

20. Glateaufer Trail
This site has diverse habitat areas within a short walking distance. The highlight is several large blocks of shrub/scrub providing nesting habitat for "early successional" forest birds, such as Eastern Towhee, Indigo Bunting, and Ruffed Grouse. A short drive-way just north of Lower Gum Springs Road leads to a parking area in a large scrub area. North along Mt. Hope Road are parking areas as for trail access to explore old fields, small ponds, and mature forests.

21. Strawberry Hill Nature Preserve
With ten miles of trails on 609 acres, a diversity of habitats and birdwatching opportunities abound. Find information, directions and a downloadable trail map:
www.strawberryhill.org

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Note that this version of the guide is a working draft and suggestions for improvement are welcomed. Send to Paul Zeph: preid@audubon.org; 717 374 6686.