

# BIRDING IN KESSLER MOUNTAIN PARK



Summer Tanager along Kessler Mountain Road June 19, 2014

Birds are distributed in the landscape according to their ecological needs. While most of Kessler is upland hardwood forest, if you take the parts of Kessler now owned by City of Fayetteville (about 600 acres) with the surrounding private lands not likely to be developed, habitats also include open pastures, old overgrown fields, bottomlands with flowing streams, and a modest amount of development at the urban interface.

Kessler Mountain Park hosts at least 125 bird species. This total will increase with more birding over time:

**PERMANENT RESIDENTS** are species present in all seasons. These total about 40 species. Examples include Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, Pileated and Downy Woodpeckers, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, and House Finch.

**SUMMER RESIDENTS** are birds present primarily or exclusively during the nesting season. These total about 43 species. This includes birds like Broad-winged Hawk, Red-eyed and White-eyed

Vireos, Wood Thrush, Black-and-white Warbler, Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, Indigo Bunting, Whip-poor-will and Chuck-will's-widow, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

**TRANSIENTS** include at least 24 species that pass through on their northward and southward migrations, but do not remain for either summer or winter. Examples include Olive-sided Flycatcher, Philadelphia Vireo, Tennessee and Nashville Warblers (and other warblers), Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Swainson's Thrush.

**WINTER RESIDENTS** include those birds present here only during cold weather. These total at least 17 species. Examples include Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Dark-eyed Junco, White-throated Sparrow and occasional overflights by Bald Eagles.

There are several ways to go birding on Kessler:



Painted Bunting along Judge Cummings Road June 19, 2014

**BY VEHICLE** Public roads like Smoke House Trail, Judge Cummings Road (WC 200 with access to Regional Park) and Kessler Mountain Road (WC 201), all provide views to the mountain and cover habitats in or adjacent to the park. On the west side in the Farmington area, public roads including Holland, Archie Watkins, and Wolfdale all provide a way to find birds on Kessler's lower slopes and in

the urban interface. Since examples of all Kessler habitats are visible along these roads, roadside birding makes it possible for those with mobility limitations to enjoy a high percentage of birds that may be found anywhere on the mountain.

**ON FOOT** The trail system on Kessler as it exists in June 2014 was developed for mountain biking, but these trails are open for all other uses, too. It is possible to use them to walk a loop to include both the mountain top and forested slopes. A birding hike can include crossing the entire top of the mountain from the towers area in the south (off Kessler Mountain Road) through the upland forests of the park and exiting in the north at Rock City, which is private land, but currently open for limited public use. If time is limited, consider visiting Rock City, located on private land. You will need to sign a release form at the trailhead, but this just takes a minute or two, and the birding is always interesting. The regional park with its athletic fields is being developed off Judge Cummings Road. This is an excellent area to seek birds of pastures, hayfields and old fields with thickets and fencerows.



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher on nest along Judge Cummings Road April 16, 2014

--Prepared by Joe Neal with editing by Doug James, June 2014