



Forest Elders

Escape to an Earlier Time

The giant trees of Northern Alabama's mature forests have stood throughout generations, witnessing considerable natural, historical, and cultural changes. Some probably witnessed the Civil War while others only date back to when the Muscle Shoals were tamed. Because of the rich habitat they provide, these elders of the forest host special birds that don't venture far from their ancient limbs.

Listen Before You Look

Because the extensive forest canopy creates a deep shade, spotting birds can be difficult. Birders should listen carefully to the variety of sounds the forest residents make. Familiarity with bird songs will reveal a bird's identity quicker than trying to discern it in a thick green canopy. Many birds are quiet in the middle of the day as they forage for food or tend to their young. However, a visit early in the morning or at the end of the day will ensure a fantastic chorus of bird song.



Pileated Woodpecker/Perry C. Covington

Pileated Woodpecker

One of the bird's colloquial names, "Lord God Woodpecker," says it all. This is Alabama's largest woodpecker. Its impressive size and striking black, white and red plumage makes it a real showstopper. Even if you don't see the bird, its powerful drumming can often be heard from deep within the forest.



Wood Thrush/Walt Burch

Wood Thrush

To many the song of the Wood Thrush represents true forest wilderness east of the Mississippi. This red-dish brown thrush sports a heavily spotted potbelly. The warm brown tone and black spots help this bird fade into the background when it isn't actively searching for worms in the dry leaves on the forest floor.



Great Crested Flycatcher/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Isidor Jeklin

Great Crested Flycatcher

This bird's distinctive *queep* call will often betray its presence high in the canopy. Careful observation might find the bird perched overhead or perhaps tending to its nest in a tree hollow closer to eye level.



Red-eyed Vireo/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Mike Hopiak

Red-eyed Vireo

The Red-eyed Vireo seems to be constantly taunting as it utters a hurried phrase that some interpret as *here-I-am, in-the-tree, look-up, at-the-top* repeated over and over again. Look for movement in the lower canopy to catch a glimpse of this songster.

Glorious Spring Migration

Hardwood forests are at their best during spring migration when almost any songbird in the eastern United States may be found. Look for:

- Flycatchers - More than ten species can be seen. However, identifying some of them is a real challenge.
- Thrushes - Five species of *Catharus* thrush can be found as well as American Robin and Eastern Bluebird.
- Warblers - Well over thirty species of warbler are possible including such state rarities as Connecticut and Mourning warblers.
- Grosbeaks - Rose-breasted Grosbeaks can be found in the treetops and Blue Grosbeaks in the neighboring fields.

