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## Maine wants to block Trump from 2024 ballot

### Secretary of state cites 14th Amendment for decision

David Jackson  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Maine’s top election official said Thursday she wants to remove Donald Trump’s name from the presidential ballot, a decision that will likely be appealed along with a similar ruling in Colorado.

Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, a Democrat, announced the decision Thursday, saying the “insurrectionist ban” in the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution applies to Trump and the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

The evidence demonstrates that the insurrection “occurred at the behest of, and with the knowledge and support of, the outgoing President (Trump),” Bellows wrote in her decision. “The U.S. Constitution does not tolerate an assault on the foundations of our government.”

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Maine’s Secretary of State said Thursday she wants to remove Donald Trump’s name from the 2024 presidential ballot, a decision that will likely be appealed.

KAMIL KRZACZYNSKI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



The purple finch is a seasonal migrant only found in the Smokies through the winter season. It is often seen feeding on seeds high in treetops. FRED J. ALSOP III/COURTESY OF GSMA

## Our winsome birds of winter; join the count



Word from the Smokies  
Aaron Searcy  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Whoever it was that first penned the classic holiday carol “The Twelve Days of Christmas” was clearly in love with a birder. Of the song’s 12 verses that describe gifts presented to a “true love” between Christmas Day and the day before Epiphany, or Jan. 5, more than half are devoted to birds of one feather or another.

The song describes gifts made of partridges,

turtle doves, geese, swans, hens, and calling or “colly” birds — and even the verse dedicated to “five gold rings” likely referred to ringed pheasants or goldfinches. Although the first published lyrics for the carol place its origin in late 18th century England, at least one of its messages continues to resonate today: Winter is still a great time for appreciating birds.

In the Great Smoky Mountains, roughly 60 or so different species of birds remain through every season. As winter arrives, several of these simply move to slightly lower elevations to avoid the frigid cold. While many warblers, vireos, orioles, tanagers, and

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## Haley walks back answer about cause of Civil War

### Blames Democratic ‘plant’ for town hall question

Savannah Kuchar  
USA TODAY

Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley, who is facing backlash over her response to a question about the Civil War at a New Hampshire campaign event, alleged without evidence Thurs-

day that the questioner was potentially a Democratic “plant.”

“We know when they’re there. We know what they’re doing,” Haley said during an interview with the radio show The Pulse of NH.

Haley was asked what caused the Civil War by an attendee at a Berlin, New Hampshire, town hall Wednesday night. The former South Carolina governor subsequently drew criticism from Republicans and Democrats alike for her response that left out any mention

of slavery.

“I mean, I think the cause of the Civil War was basically how the government was going to run. The freedoms and what people could and couldn’t do,” Haley answered at the event. She tried to turn the question back to the attendee, who said he would rather hear her answer.

The former governor walked back her answer the morning after the town hall, saying in the local radio interview that “of course the Civil War was about slav-

ery.”

“We know that. That’s the easy part of it,” Haley said Thursday. “What I was saying was, what does it mean to us today? What it means to us today is about freedom.”

“Yes, I know it was about slavery,” she added. “I’m from the South, of course, you know it’s about slavery.”

Along with defending her answer, Haley also pointed blame at the man

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# Searcy

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flycatchers may decamp entirely for warmer climes farther south, others soon arrive from the north to replace them. These winter migrants include the purple finch, hermit thrush, evening grosbeak, and swamp and white-throated sparrows.

Keith Watson is one local birding guide and former National Park Service biologist who continues to find plenty to see in the Smokies through the winter months. For the last several years, he's helped coordinate an annual Christmas Bird Count in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which is part of an international campaign organized by the Audubon Society between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5. Watson first began participating in the annual count and meeting up with other birders in the process when he was a graduate student at the University of Tennessee in the 1970s.

"People will get pre-assigned areas before they go out and spend as much time as they can or want to — either before daylight or maybe after dusk calling for owls," says Watson. "Some people can only spend half a day doing it, but others will spend all day long doing it and wish they had more time."

This year, two counts will be held within the national park — one in Cades Cove on Jan. 1 and another around Sugarlands Visitor Center on Jan. 5. For the Sugarlands count near Gatlinburg, Tennessee, Watson expects his group to record around 60 or more different bird species thanks to a diversity of habitat found in the area.

"There will be creeks and rivers and mountains but also more urban and developed areas," says Watson. "We actually tend to pick up a few more species in our circle than they do in Cades Cove because of the different kinds of habitats."

Last year, the count Watson organized in the park produced a few notable sightings of peregrine falcon, brown-headed nuthatch, gray catbird, rusty blackbird, and pine siskin, while the Cades Cove count found American woodcock, red crossbill, and common merganser. This year, Watson hopes to record birds in new areas within the standardized 15-mile circle dictated by the Audubon Society.



Pine siskins were among the species observed by volunteers at the most recent Christmas Bird Count conducted near Gatlinburg, Tennessee. They are most abundant and visible at lower elevations in winter. FRED J. ALSOP III/COURTESY OF GSMA



The black-capped chickadee is a relatively common permanent resident of the Great Smoky Mountains. It is larger than the Carolina chickadee and typically found above 4,000 feet, though some individuals move downward into the middle elevations in winter. FRED J. ALSOP III/COURTESY OF GSMA



Smokies locals have long referred to dark-eyed juncos as "snowbirds," since their arrival in the fall serves as a reliable sign that winter is near. Although they are year-round residents of the Smokies, they move to lower elevations for the colder months. FRED J. ALSOP III/COURTESY OF GSMA

"It's a huge area with lots of places to cover, and they're short winter days," he says. The more volunteers, the better.

According to "Birds of the Smokies" by Fred Alsop III, a field guide available at park visitor centers, most birds will be found at low-to-middle elevations in the wintertime, and "yellow-rumped warblers, white-throated sparrows, and dark-eyed juncos become common." In fact, dark-eyed juncos were often called

"snowbirds" by locals, since their appearance at lower elevations signaled that winter was coming.

Higher up, a few species manage to hang on despite the cold.

"The few hardy species that stay in the snow-laden spruce-fir forests include the common raven, dark-eyed junco, red-breasted nuthatch, black-capped chickadee, and erratically fluctuating numbers of wintering pine siskins, evening grosbeaks, and red crossbills," says Alsop. In the more open areas at lower elevations like Cades Cove, Oconaluftee, or Cataloochee, he advises winter birders to keep an eye out for Wilson's snipe and savannah sparrow.

A collective bird count following the guidelines set by the Audubon Society has been conducted in Great Smoky Mountains National Park since 1935. Beyond encouraging birders to come together for a common cause, the annual campaign has produced decades of invaluable data that has helped reveal long-term trends for bird populations. According to the Audubon Society, Christmas Bird Count data has been used in hundreds of peer-reviewed publications and government reports that are vital to wildlife conservation addressing the risks posed by development and climate change to overall biodiversity.

Both of the current Christmas Bird Count areas within the Smokies are on the Tennessee side of the park, but birders on the North Carolina side can still contribute to community science without traveling too far. Great Smoky Mountains National Park was recently added to the statewide North Carolina Breeding Bird Atlas, which invites volunteers to document the birds they see via the app eBird. Another collective winter campaign — the Great Backyard Bird Count organized by the Audubon Society, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Birds Canada — takes place over President's Day weekend every February. More information can be found at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org).

Those who would like to take part in this year's Christmas Bird Count can find more information about registration and how to participate at [audubon.org](http://audubon.org). To register for the Cades Cove event on Jan. 1, contact Susan Hoyle at [hoyleshrike@gmail.com](mailto:hoyleshrike@gmail.com). Those interested in the Sugarlands count on Jan. 5 should contact Keith Watson at [pied-bird@comcast.net](mailto:pied-bird@comcast.net).

Aaron Searcy is lead editor for the 29,000-member Great Smoky Mountains Association. Reach him at [aaron@gsmassoc.org](mailto:aaron@gsmassoc.org).

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