



## Packers-49ers rivalry has produced memorable moments

SPORTS, 1B

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## Strange species make 'accidental' appearances



Limpkins are large wading birds known for their shrieking cries. One limpkin was seen hanging around last fall in Great Smoky Mountains National Park's popular Cades Cove. PROVIDED BY COURT HARDING



**Word from the Smokies**  
Frances Figart  
Staff columnist

Red-necked phalarope, Bonaparte's gull, band-rumped storm-petrel, and harlequin duck.

If you are thinking these don't sound like names that should be included in a story about Great Smoky Mountains National Park, you're right. These birds aren't usually in the park. But they have been documented as "accidentals" — species that show up outside their normal range, often making a one-time only appearance.

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The white-winged crossbill, a medium-sized stocky finch with a crisscrossed bill, was recorded in the Smokies by naturalist Arthur Stupka in 1963, and another record shows it made a second accidental appearance in 1981. PROVIDED BY OWEN STRICKLAND

## Taste of Asheville returns in support of restaurants

**Tiana Kennell**  
Asheville Citizen Times  
USA TODAY NETWORK

ASHEVILLE - Asheville Independent Restaurant Association's Taste of Asheville will bring 50 food and 10 beverage partners together under one roof Feb. 1 for its annual tasting extravaganza.

"This is the perfect opportunity to try out some new places or places that have been on your list to go to," said AIR Executive Director Meghan Rogers. "You have 50 restaurants all in one place putting out their best food and samples for you so it's a great way to discover some new places."

Attendees will also have the chance to meet, mix and mingle with the teams from the restaurants and brands.

It's nearly a sold-out event, so those who haven't nabbed a ticket are advised to act fast and get one.

A general admission ticket is \$80 and may be purchased via eventbrite.com.

The event is from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Mission Health / A-B Tech Conference Center.

"I promise no one will walk away hungry," Rogers said.

The remaining food from the event is donated to Food Connections, which distributes portions to shelters and community programs across the area.

Rogers said that "Taste of Asheville is AIR's premier event of the year."

It's also AIR's major fundraiser, which benefits the membership-based organization's year-round efforts to support local, independent food and beverage businesses.

"It allows us to continue to provide the education and advocacy support for our independent restaurant community," Rogers said.

Education leads the charge as AIR works with its members to ensure they understand the rules and regulations from agencies like the North Carolina Health Department and the Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission.

See **RESTAURANTS**, Page 4A

## Biden visits North Carolina to promote internet access

### Making state a priority for November election

**Josh Boak**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH - President Joe Biden on Thursday unveiled \$82 million for North Carolina to help connect 16,000 new households and businesses to high-speed internet, delivering an election-year pitch about policies he says are "just getting started" at improving the United States.

Biden, the Democratic incumbent who is campaigning to win a second term, coupled his economic message

with a few jabs at his predecessor, Donald Trump, currently the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination and his most likely future challenger.

Biden brought up Trump's recent comment that he hoped the economy would crash soon because he doesn't want to preside over job losses if he were to be reelected in November.

Biden told his audience that Trump already was like Herbert Hoover, who held office during the 1929 stock market crash.

"He's the only president to be president for four years and lose jobs," Biden said of Trump.

Biden said the work his administra-

tion is doing in North Carolina, on high-speed internet, infrastructure and more, is happening in communities across the country, regardless of the politics.

"What we're doing here in North Carolina is one piece of a much bigger story," he said. Biden said he was keeping his promise "to be a president for all America, whether you voted for me or not."

Biden talked about all the people who need high-speed internet because they work from home, businesses who need it to reach customers and students who need to do their school work.

See **BIDEN**, Page 4A



President Joe Biden speaks in Raleigh, on Thursday. Biden is visiting NC to highlight \$82M in new spending to connect 16,000 households and businesses to high-speed internet. Biden's campaign is making winning NC and its 16 electoral votes a top priority in this year's election.

MANUEL BALCE CENETA/AP



# Smokies

Continued from Page 1A

“In published bird lists generally, species which have been entered upon the basis of one occurrence only, are called ‘accidentals,’” wrote the field biologist and zoologist Joseph Grinnell in his 1922 paper “The Role of the Accidental.”

The most recent example in the Smokies is a limpkin that hung around Cades Cove much of this past fall. There are two conflicting theories that possibly explain its presence in the open fields, grasses, and water bodies of the cove.

“Either the limpkins blew in on the coattails of a hurricane — like the flamingo sightings last fall from Alabama, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and other states,” says Smokies Science Coordinator Paul E. Super, “or this is part of a larger expansion of their range, as individuals have been seen outside of their usual U.S. range (Florida and southern Georgia) more frequently in recent years, possibly linked to expansion of invasive apple snails, a food item of choice.”

While ornithologists puzzle over which theory to credit, in addition to the Cades Cove bird, there were at least two limpkins documented in Western North Carolina last fall, several in the Maryville, Tennessee, area, and probably another in Knoxville.

Such accidental sightings are not limited to limpkins. Back in May 2001, Keith Watson of the Southern Appalachian Bird Conservancy remembers walking up to Purchase Knob from the entrance road with his wife, Ruth, and one of his then U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service colleagues, Chuck Hunter.

“When we exited the forest and entered into the grassy section of the knob, Chuck exclaimed: ‘Chestnut-collared longspur!’ Not having seen one or heard one before, the chase was on,” Keith Watson recalls. “We both ran up the hill, found the bird, confirmed the identification, and made some notes on field marks so we could adequately document the observation and record.”

A few of the other vagrant birds (some also use the term “vagrant” to describe these species) that have been added to the park list over the years include a sooty tern in 1926; white-winged crossbills in both 1963 and 1981; a swal-



The swallow-tailed kite is a raptor that breeds in the southeastern United States as well as eastern Peru and northern Argentina. Great Smoky Mountains National Park has records of individuals appearing in 1970, 2010, 2015, and 2016.

ANDY REAGO AND CHRISSY MCCLARREN

low-tailed kite in 2010; a rufous hummingbird in 2020; and a Townsend’s solitaire in 2021.

How do accidentals happen? Storms can blow individuals in from the coast, or low, icy clouds force traveling shorebirds down onto the park during migration. It’s also possible for individual birds of western species to make a 90 (or 270) degree shift in their migratory orientation and begin traveling east rather than south.

Fred Alsop, author of “Birds of the Smokies,” (rereleased in a new edition by Great Smoky Mountains Association in 2023), was guiding a birding tour in Cades Cove on a spring morning in 1989. He led the birders onto Sparks Lane to check the open fields.

“Just after fording Abrams Creek,” Alsop recalls, “we were walking south along the gravel roadway when I spotted a gray bird with a long tail perched on one of the barbed-wire fences across the field towards the wastewater settling ponds. I quickly identified it as a scissor-tailed flycatcher, much to my delight and the excitement of the group.”

These wastewater settling ponds constitute the only big bodies of still water in Cades Cove, and as such can attract bird species not commonly found in other parts of the park. On a late fall

day not long after the flycatcher sighting, Alsop glimpsed a small grayish shorebird swimming on the surface of the nearest pond.

“As I watched, it would often spin slowly like at top in tight circles and pick at the materials brought to the surface in this bird-created whirlpool,” he says. “I identified it as a red phalarope, an Arctic Circle-nesting species that generally spends the winter at sea.”

Another cause for accidentals is that, during the normal post-breeding dispersal, young inexperienced birds may follow a food source or a change in climate to get away from the crowd and explore new territory — and find themselves in an unfamiliar place.

“Birds tend to be the main species for accidental status,” says Super, “partly because they fly and partly because we know enough about their distribution that we can recognize when something is outside its expected range.”

On September 22, 2018, retired park ranger and volunteer Warren Bielenberg was performing a routine butterfly survey in Cades Cove when he noticed something unusual.

“I saw a very large skipper and managed to get identifiable photos of the first park record of a Brazilian skipper,” Bielenberg says. “These are usually

found in southern Texas and along the Gulf Coast. The host plants are canna lilies, and I don’t know of any in Cades Cove.”

Even back in 1922, Grinnell could also “conceive of a snail in the role of an ‘accidental,’ an individual which has wandered a few feet or a few rods beyond the usual confines of the habitat of its species. Given the element of time ... the same processes will hold for the slower moving creatures as they seem to do for those gifted with extreme mobility.”

Super suggests that maybe some animals have been inadvertently assisted by the vehicle of a park visitor — an occurrence more common in coastal areas where birds might take a ride on a large freighter, or reptiles, amphibians, or insects might be moved by cars.

“We have a couple observations of armadillos climbing out of pickups that were driving down the road in Western North Carolina, possibly explaining how they got to the park,” he muses.

If you are getting the feeling that the term “accidental” doesn’t quite fit, kudos to you. Grinnell in his 1922 paper points out that “the way in which the word is used by ornithologists is really a misapplication of the term. ... The occurrence of individual birds a greater or less distance beyond the bounds of the plentiful existence of the species to which they belong is the regular thing, to be expected.

There is nothing really ‘accidental’ about it; the process is part of the ordinary evolutionary program.”

New technologies like the apps eBird and iNaturalist have helped increase our awareness of unusual sightings. Anyone can contribute to documenting accidental sightings in the Smokies by capturing images or sound recordings and uploading them via the iNaturalist app. These submissions provide valuable data for biologists and may include species never before documented in the national park.

As Bielenberg reminds us, “the lesson is that birds and butterflies don’t read or follow field guides, so keep your eyes open, and you may find an unusual critter in the park.”

Frances Figart (*rhymes with “tiger”*) is the editor of “Smokies Life Journal” and the Creative Services Director for the 29,000-member Great Smoky Mountains Association, an educational nonprofit partner of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Reach her at [frances@gsmassoc.org](mailto:frances@gsmassoc.org).

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