

ITINERARY

Fall for Cape May

I. September 20 – 26, 2025

II. September 28 – October 4, 2025



*Northern Flickers are common migrants in Cape May, with reports of hundred of birds passing through on some days.
Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

We include here information for those interested in the 2025 Field Guides Fall for Cape May tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

Cape May, New Jersey is a magical place any time of year, but in the fall it can be the stuff of legend. Here, on a misty morning, you might see scores of Great Blue Herons rise from the marshes in great squawking squadrons. You might stand on the Cape May hawk watch on a day like the one in 2005 when 298 Peregrine Falcons rocketed over the beaches of Cape May Point State Park, leaving awe and a bit of envy in their wake. You might find warbler species in the double digits in the morning, marvel at scores of raptors sprinkled like pepper across the skies in the afternoon, and retire for the evening with the trace of a fishing Black Skimmer's graceful flight etched in your memory. And if you're very lucky, you

might awaken in the morning to discover a fabled “fallout,” when weather conditions conspire to dump a mother lode of feathered jewels onto the southernmost tip of New Jersey.

Cape May is ideally situated for a study of bird migration. Bounded on the east by the Atlantic Ocean and on the west by the Delaware Bay, the Cape May peninsula is a natural cul-de-sac and migration trap for an extraordinary number and tremendous variety of southbound migrants. We can expect to see about a dozen species of raptors, likely including big flights of Cooper’s and Sharp-shinned hawks, American Kestrels, Merlins, and Peregrine Falcons. Cape May is also legendary for its waterfowl, shorebird, and landbird migrations. A cold front and northwest winds in late September or early October may yield thousands of Tree Swallows as well as scores of Northern Flickers, Eastern Wood-Pewees, Blue Jays, vireos, warblers, and sparrows, all visible within a few hours of leisurely birding. And the area is famous for its vagrants and species otherwise unusual on the Atlantic coast: Eurasian Wigeon, Swainson’s Hawk, Marbled Godwit, Western Kingbird, Dickcissel, and Lark and Clay-colored sparrows are among the regulars in this category, and past tours have found Rufous Hummingbird, Say’s Phoebe, Wilson’s Phalarope, Common Raven, Lapland Longspur, and Northern Wheatear as well.

Ecologically, Cape May is an extension of the New Jersey coastal plain. The dunes in late September and early October are ablaze with goldenrods and asters, and several species of migrant butterflies usually add to the animation along the coastline. Further inland, Wax Myrtle and Red Cedar thickets and woodlots of Red Maple and Sweetgum provide shelter for weary landbird migrants attempting to avoid the eager eyes of the Cooper’s and Sharp-shinned hawks and the little terror that is the Merlin.

From the Cape May peninsula itself, we’ll travel several miles up the coast to visit the seawatch site in Avalon, the coastal sandspit of Stone Harbor Point, which often holds hundreds or thousands of shorebirds, and saltmarshes around Stone Harbor and on Nummy Island, which should provide good looks at a variety of herons and egrets, plus our best chances at Saltmarsh, Nelson’s, and Seaside sparrows. During our stay in Cape May, we’ll have time to visit (and re-visit) some of the most productive birding locations on America’s east coast. Comfortable accommodations, good meals, and easy birding will make our Cape May experience a memory not soon forgotten.



We'll keep a lookout for anything out of the ordinary, such as the Sandwich Tern seen here with Royals Terns. While not rare, Sandwich Terns breed south of Cape May, and are rarely seen this far north. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.

We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour. Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS & WALKING:** There will be moderate amounts of walking but mostly on flat ground (up to 3 miles per day). Although most of it will be on paved or gravel roads, we will be on some trails and boardwalks but they're well-maintained and will have no significant obstacles. Please note that we will probably walk a short distance on a sandy beach as well.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** Keep in mind that we may stand for long periods of time while we explore the Cape May area and its birds. Participants must be comfortable and capable on their feet.
- **PACE:** The days will be relatively long, but fairly relaxed. Participants can expect early mornings (6:30-7:00 a.m. departures, with field breakfasts); both morning and afternoon birding sessions, with occasional afternoon breaks. Please note that we cannot guarantee afternoon breaks every day.
- **WEATHER:** Fall weather is usually mild at Cape May. Expect temperatures in the 50s in the evening, with days ranging from the low 60s to low 80s F. Rain showers and windy conditions are possible.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** We will plan to make regular stops at indoor, modern facilities. If bush stops are needed between these breaks, participants must be comfortable and prepared to use either latrines or nature.
- **OPTING OUT:** As this short tour stays at the same lodging throughout, participants may be able to opt out of a day or half-day, if they desire, and depending on the itinerary for that day.

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.

About the Birding Areas



Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area (WMA), an extensive area of fields, hedgerows, and forest along the Delaware Bay shore, offers some of the best migration birding in New Jersey. Five large fields, surrounded by woodland and crisscrossed by tracks, offer plenty of resting and feeding places for birds, and plenty of vantage points for birders. On a “wave day,” when large numbers of migrants are moving, it can be superb for migrant passerines including woodpeckers, flycatchers, warblers, vireos, tanagers, orioles, and sparrows. This location offers our best chances for Prairie Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, and Red-headed Woodpecker.

Cape May Point State Park features coastal thickets, marshes, and small ponds, which are often filled with a variety of herons and shorebirds. The constant presence of migrating raptors, especially accipiters and falcons, makes the area a major attraction, even on light flight days. The Cape May Bird Observatory’s hawk watch platform—the official counting station at Cape May—is a fine spot from which to watch

approaching raptors arriving at the point, and the nearby beachfront provides an excellent vantage of the Atlantic. Forster’s and Royal terns commonly feed offshore at this time of year, easterly winds sometimes bring jaegers in close, and Bottlenose Dolphins often gather in huge pods prior to their journey south.

Cox Hall Creek WMA is a 253-acre former golf course with paved paths winding through its old fairways; it is now maintained as grassland and savannah, wooded copses, and a beautiful swamp forest along Cox Hall Creek. Locally, it is one of our best sites for woodpeckers, Eastern Bluebird, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Eastern Towhee, and Chipping Sparrow, and the park's trout-stocked main pond is a magnet for migrating Ospreys.

Lake Lily, adjacent to the Cape May Bird Observatory's Northwood Center, is a small lake good for unusual ducks such as Eurasian Wigeon, while the surrounding shrubbery sometimes harbors an assortment of warblers or sparrows—and sometimes such vagrants as Western Kingbird. The area around the Northwood Center itself is often alive with mixed passerine flocks – led by local Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmice, and accompanied by any migrants in the area – and we'll make regular checks there to see what's around.

The South Cape May Meadows Nature Preserve (locally known as “The Meadows”) is an extensive area just north of Cape May Point that can be good for shorebirds (if water levels are low) and/or puddle ducks (if water levels are higher). The property, owned by The Nature Conservancy, has a lengthy beachfront from which we can scan for terns, skimmers, and early scoters; we'll also keep an eye out for Virginia Rails and Soras, both of which sometimes haunt the stands of cattails that blanket the reserve. This is a regular resting spot for the Lesser Black-backed Gull, which is found in growing numbers in Cape May.

Stone Harbor is located a few miles north of Cape May and includes vast salt marshes and tidal flats as well as good overlooks of the ocean. This area and nearby **Nummy Island** should provide looks at good numbers of egrets, herons of several species (including Yellow-crowned Night-Heron), and White and Glossy ibises as well as Boat-tailed Grackle, Seaside and Saltmarsh sparrows, and Clapper Rail. This is an area to watch for lingering Piping Plovers.



The Saltmarsh Sparrow breeds in Spartina meadows along the east coast. These habitats are being affected by climate change and development, so these sparrows are considered endangered. Photograph by guide Tom Johnson.

The Coast Guard ponds, two large freshwater ponds north of Cape May, are prime locations for various herons and egrets, Forster's Tern, and assorted waterfowl and shorebirds. Nearby **Two Mile Landing** is another good spot for American Bittern, Clapper Rail, and various shorebirds, and has also turned up a handful of vagrants over the years – including 2018's Lapland Longspur.



The fall warbler migration is as exciting as the spring. Although many of the birds will be in immature or winter plumage, we should be able to find as many as 15 species of warblers, including the Northern Parula pictured here, plus many other passerine migrants. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Itinerary for Fall for Cape May

Day 1. Arrival in Cape May. *Those participants who are flying into the Philadelphia airport (PHL) and driving down with us should plan to meet us near the food stand in the baggage claim area of Terminal B/C by 2:30 p.m. Please schedule flights to arrive no later than 1:30 p.m. **If you are planning to drive with us to Cape May, we must have your arrival flight information.***

Once we've checked into our hotel, we'll plan a short afternoon birding jaunt, if the weather and flight arrival times allow. (If you're arriving separately, check for a message with the hotel front desk when you get there.) Following our excursion, we'll head to one of Cape May's many fine restaurants for dinner and discussion of plans for the upcoming week. Night in Cape May.

Days 2-6. Cape May and nearby areas. As the movement of most migrants is strongly influenced by weather conditions (especially wind or rain), our exact schedule during these five days will be flexible so that we can adapt to the conditions of the moment. Different areas will be more or less productive for birding depending on such things as tide, wind direction, and the weather at the time, but during our stay we plan to visit all of the best spots in and near Cape May, many of them more than once.

On one of the days, we will take a two-hour boat tour of the back bay areas of Cape May and nearby Wildwood. From our comfortable boat (maximum of forty passengers), we should get good looks at a variety of shorebirds, herons, and terns as well as Peregrine Falcon and Clapper Rail. After five days, we will have visited the area's best birding spots and observed a representative cross section of Cape May's migrant and resident birds. It should be an exciting week! Nights in Cape May.

Day 7. Departure from Cape May. After a final morning birding in Cape May, we'll head north to the Philadelphia Airport. We'll plan to arrive at around 2:00 p.m. **If you are driving north with us, please do not schedule a flight before 4:00 p.m.**

About Your Guide

Doug Gochfeld was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, and his interest in birds was sparked at a young age, in part by his father. This interest soon spiraled into a full-blown obsession for Doug for a few years before he abruptly shelved it, in favor of baseball, for several adolescent years. He picked up his interest in birds again in college and once again became a dedicated/obsessed birder. For several years before starting to lead a full slate of tours for Field Guides in 2016, he traveled extensively as a working birder. This included multiple seasons monitoring migration at the legendary migration hotspots of Cape May, New Jersey, and Eilat in Israel. He also guided on St. Paul Island, in Alaska's Pribilof Islands, for parts of four years.

Doug is fascinated with the avifauna (and other fauna and flora!) of the Southeast Asia and Australasia region, has guided a regular suite of Field Guides tours to the region. His strongest interests in birding are migration, vagrancy, and patterns of distribution, and he's always excited to share his enthusiasm in, and knowledge of, these subjects and much more on his tours, whether close to home or halfway around the world.

Sam Wilson grew up in New Jersey and had his spark moment as a young adult visiting Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. On his first visit he witnessed an epic migration of 10,000 Broad-winged Hawks as they took to the skies over the Appalachian ridges. He was hooked, and his fascination with bird migration has only grown.

Sam spent four years working in Cape May, New Jersey, for New Jersey Audubon developing bird migration programs for school groups and families and leading group trips for Cape May Bird Observatory and New Jersey Young Birders Club. He enjoyed a stint in the Hawaiian Islands doing breeding bird surveys in the remote Alakai Swamp for the Kauai Forest Birds Recovery project (though his gear didn't recover!).

Eventually, wanderlust led him to Alaska, where he led backcountry trips focused on birds and wildlife in Denali National Park, as well as guided trips for birding festivals along the Kenai Peninsula and Copper River. He has since led group trips as a naturalist-guide in most regions of the country with a special focus on National Parks and Wilderness areas. Sam is an eBird reviewer in Alaska and contributor to both *Cape May Magazine* and ABA's *Birding* magazine.

When not experimenting with flight photography, investigating nocturnal migration, or researching biodiversity hot spots, Sam enjoys backpacking, growing super-hot peppers, discovering new music, and creating experimental dishes (usually Asian cuisine). Sam and his wife, Margeaux, have spent months traveling around the world seeking out rare birds and wildlife. They currently reside in Anchorage, Alaska.

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for complete tour schedules for Doug and Sam; just click their photos.

"Doug's enthusiasm, skill and tenacity at finding birds is amazing. He clearly loves showing birds to people - be it a common or not so common bird". D. S. Colorado Grouse

"Sam is an expert guide and one of the best spotters we've ever experienced. He was great to get us on hard-to-see birds. He worked well with all the participants and was knowledgeable about the birds and plants." A.D., Texas Coast Migration Spectacle

Financial Information

FEE: \$3425 from Philadelphia

DEPOSIT: \$350 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: March 24, 2025 (Tour I); April 1, 2025 (Tour II)

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$825

LIMIT: 7

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Christine Boilard. Christine will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact her!

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Those participants who are flying into Philadelphia and driving down with us should plan to meet the guide at **2:30 p.m. on Day 1, near the food stand in the Terminal B/C baggage claim area**. Please plan to arrive by no later than 1:30 p.m., in order to reach the meeting point on time. We will return to Philadelphia by 2:00 p.m. on the final day of the tour; **please do not schedule a departure flight before 4:00 p.m.**

Field Guides is a full-service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees. **Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.**

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The **tour fee** is \$3425 for one person in double occupancy from Cape May. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 6, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through lunch on Day 7, all ground transportation including round-trip transportation from the Philadelphia airport to Cape May, boat trips, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for boatmen and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from the tour, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local guides, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$825. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR LIMITS: Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open. However, on occasion, we will send along a guide in training on a tour. In these cases, one seat in the van or bus will be taken by the guide in training. Our guides will have a rotation system within the vehicle so that clients share the inconvenience equally. We hope this minor inconvenience will be more than offset by the advantages of having another guide along.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact us at fieldguides.com/contact-us/. Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$350** per person, or see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or **by March 24, 2025 (Tour I); April 1, 2025 (Tour II)**. **We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.**

Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and full payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the full tour fee is non-refundable, which would include the full deposit if the final payment has not yet been paid. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs within 90 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 90 to 179 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY).

US citizens will receive information from us regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/> and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii. We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

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