

ITINERARY

Fall for Cape May

October 3 – 10, 2026



*American Kestrels are common migrants in Cape May, with reports of hundreds of birds passing through on some days.
Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

We include here information for those interested in the 2026 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. Perhaps, if you're very lucky, you might awaken in the morning to discover one of the fabled fall phenomenons of Cape May: a huge flight of thousands

of birds, or a “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, Merlin, 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.



Tree Swallows will be migrating during our time in Cape May, and we will likely run across at least one large concentration of these lovely birds. Photograph by participant Emma Bishop.

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 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.



*We'll watch for wintering Lesser Black-backed Gulls on the shores and beaches.
Photograph by participant Len Sander.*

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.

Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge (also known as "Brigantine" or "Brig") is one of the real birding gems of the entire Mid-Atlantic region; its vast assemblage of salt and freshwater marshes, brackish impoundments, and upland forests are accessed by an 8-mile wildlife drive. The refuge offers a fine assortment of waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors (including Peregrine Falcon and Bald Eagle), and rarities and vagrants are always a possibility.



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 Cape May Warbler pictured here, plus many other passerine migrants. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Itinerary for Fall for Cape May

Day 1, Sat, 3 Oct. Arrival in Philadelphia. Plan to arrive in time to meet the group at our Philadelphia Airport hotel at 6:30 PM for introductions and a welcome dinner. Night in Philadelphia.

Day 2, Sun, 4 Oct. Birding Heinz NWR, drive to Cape May. We will bird John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum this morning, exploring the mixed wetland/woodland habitat for migrant warblers, waterbirds, and more. We'll remain flexible with lunch depending on how the birding and weather is, but by the afternoon, we will work our way down to Cape May, check into our hotel, and, if time and weather allow, plan a short afternoon birding jaunt. 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 3-7, Mon-Fri, 5-9 Oct. 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 8, Sat, 10 Oct. Departure from Cape May, drop off at the Philadelphia airport. After a final morning birding in Cape May, we'll head north to the Philadelphia Airport, aiming to arrive around 2:00 PM. If you are driving north with us, please do not schedule a flight before 4:00 PM.

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'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

Cape May became a second home to Doug when he first worked there, thanks to the exciting birding and the warm, welcoming, and interesting local birding community, and he maintains strong bonds within the community – in fact, don't be surprised if you see random birders come over to say hi to him while we're out birding as a group. 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.

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for complete tour schedules for Doug; just click on his photo.

Financial Information

FEE: \$3995 from Philadelphia

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$1000

DEPOSIT: \$400 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: April 6, 2026

LIMIT: 7

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Maria Zaslavskaya. Maria 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: This tour begins and ends in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (PHL).

Arrival: Philadelphia **by the evening of October 3**, in time for a 6:30 PM meeting at the airport hotel.

Departure: Philadelphia on **October 10, after 4:00 PM** if driving north from Cape May with us.

Please wait to purchase airline tickets until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate. At that time, we'll be glad to assist with your flight arrangements at no service fee.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The tour fee is \$3995 for one person in double occupancy from Philadelphia. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 7, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through lunch on Day 8, all ground transportation, 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.

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 is \$1000 for those requesting a single room. 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.

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 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 electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please send your deposit of \$400 per person, 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 April 6, 2026. 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 purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to protect your investment in case of injury or illness to you or an immediate family member before or during a trip. Because we must remit early and substantial deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer refunds for cancellations outside of our Cancellation Policy. If a participant is unable to join or continue a tour due to illness, all related expenses will be their responsibility, and no refunds can be issued for missed days. Please wait to purchase insurance until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate, as most policies are non-refundable.

For full details, visit our Trip Cancellation Insurance page at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/>.

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.

10/24 – MEC; 1/25peg; 11/25 DDG; 2/26mz; peg