

ITINERARY
Spring in Cape May
May 11-17, 2025



The woods of Cape May can be full of warblers in spring. Some are migrants, but many, like this gorgeous Hooded Warbler, breed in the area. Photograph by guide Tom Johnson.

We include here information for those interested in the 2025 Field Guides Spring in 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 is best known for its fall migration, but springtime on the peninsula beckons with its own fine birding and migration spectacles. Among the highlights is the mass spawning of Horseshoe Crabs, living fossils which breed in the thousands on the beaches of the Delaware Bay, their tiny eggs providing vital sustenance to thousands of shorebirds on their long journeys north. The county's woods echo with the songs of more than 20 species of wood warblers, with local breeders including Pine, Yellow, Black-and-white, Blue-winged, Prothonotary, Prairie, Worm-eating, Hooded, and Yellow-throated warblers, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, and Louisiana Waterthrush. Yellow-breasted Chats, Eastern Kingbirds, Indigo Buntings, and Blue Grosbeaks shout challenges from overgrown fields, and we'll compare Scarlet and Summer tanagers, Baltimore and Orchard orioles, and a variety of flycatchers.

Along the bay and ocean, Marsh Wrens and Seaside and Saltmarsh sparrows chortle from reed stems, while Clapper Rails lurk below, and more than two-dozen species of shorebirds—usually including the endangered and declining Piping Plover, perhaps a few lingering Purple Sandpipers, or maybe even an Old World vagrant like a Curlew Sandpiper—patter on the shores. We might even get lucky and see some spring rarities such as Mississippi Kite or Scissor-tailed Flycatcher.

From our base in a comfortable beachfront hotel, we should be able to see upwards of 150 or more species during our week of explorations. During our stay in Cape May, we'll have time to visit (and possibly 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.



Shorebirds gather by the thousands along the shore to feast on Horseshoe Crab eggs, in preparation for their flights north to breed. Here, Red Knots and Ruddy Turnstones are joined by Laughing Gulls. We'll have a chance to witness this amazing spectacle during our week along the shore. Photo by guide Tom Johnson.

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:** Moderate amounts of walking on flat ground (up to 3 miles per day), some of it on paved roads, some on gravel or dirt roads, some on trails that have no significant obstacles. We will probably walk up to a half mile one way on a sandy beach as well.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** We may stand for long periods to observe flocks of birds.
- **PACE:** Early mornings (6-6:30 a.m. departures with field picnic breakfasts); both morning and afternoon birding sessions, with occasional afternoon breaks.
- **WEATHER:** Spring weather is usually mild at Cape May. Expect temperatures as cool as the high 50s or low 60s F in the evening, with days ranging from the high 60s to low 80s. 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:** Bathroom stops at indoor restrooms will be made regularly; comfort stops in nature are also possible, should the need arise.
- **OPTING OUT:** As this short tour stays at the same lodging throughout, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or half-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



The Delaware Bayshore stretches along the western edge of the Cape May peninsula, edged by a mix of beachfront communities and salt marsh. The area is vital for Horseshoe Crabs—living fossils which congregate by the tens of thousands each May to breed on the bay’s narrow beaches. This spawning in turn draws thousands of shorebirds, primarily Ruddy Turnstones, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Sanderlings, and a globally important number of *rufa* Red Knots, along with Laughing Gulls and a variety of opportunistic passerines. The nearby saltmarshes hold Seaside sparrows, Clapper Rails, and Marsh Wrens, and the “ghost forest” that edges the marshes may host Red-headed Woodpeckers.

Belleplain State Forest, located in the northern part of Cape May County and the southern part of neighboring Cumberland County, is a vast tract of mature forest and lowland swamp with a few slow streams and some tannin-filled lakes scattered among its 21,000 acres. Virtually every woodland

species that breeds in the county can be found here, including several southern species with ranges that barely extend into New Jersey. Among the birds we can expect are Summer and Scarlet tanagers, Baltimore and Orchard orioles, Acadian and Great Crested flycatchers, Eastern Phoebe, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Wood Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and 16 species of warblers—among them Worm-eating, Hooded, Prothonotary, Blue-winged, Prairie, Black-and-white, Yellow-throated, Ovenbird, and Louisiana Waterthrush.

Heislerville WMA is a 6900-acre system of impoundments and saltmarsh just over the border into neighboring Cumberland County. The prime attractions here are the shorebirds which rest in the impoundments when high tides cover the nearby mudflats. Regular species include Black-bellied and Semipalmated plovers, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Willet, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone, Short-billed Dowitcher, and Red Knot. For several years, Double-crested Cormorants and several species of herons have had an active rookery in one of the impoundments, and a pair of Bald Eagles have a nest nearby, too. Sand fleas can be an issue here on windless days, so be sure to bring some insect repellent along when we visit!

Higbee Beach WMA is an extensive area of fields, hedgerows, and forest along the Delaware Bayshore. The fields and hedgerows are home to Yellow-breasted Chat, Indigo Bunting, Blue Grosbeak, Field Sparrow, and Prairie Warbler, while the nearby forested dunes hold Eastern Towhee. Higbee’s location, close to the bay and just north of the Cape May peninsula’s tip, means it draws migrant birds when they first arrive into New Jersey.

Cape May Point State Park features coastal thickets, marshes, and small ponds which are often filled with a variety of herons and shorebirds. A bustling colony of Purple Martins inhabits spacious houses at one end of the parking lot, and American Oystercatcher and Lesser Black-backed Gull may be present along the beach. The woods can hold arriving migrants as well as residents such as Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Fish Crow, and Orchard Oriole. Weather permitting, we will likely have a few picnics here through the week.

The South Cape May Meadows is an extensive wetland area just east of Cape May Point. Owned by The Nature Conservancy, the property has several large ponds, extensive cattail stands, and a lengthy beachfront from which we can scan for gulls, terns, and skimmers. An evening visit might yield American Woodcock or Common Nighthawk.

Avalon and **Stone Harbor** are located a few miles north of Cape May and include vast salt marshes and tidal flats as well as good overlooks of the ocean. These communities and nearby **Nummy Island** should provide looks at good numbers of

egrets, herons (Tricolored and Little Blue are good possibilities), and Glossy Ibis as well as Ospreys, Willets, Boat-tailed Grackles, Seaside Sparrows, and Clapper Rails. The beach here is the top local spot to find breeding Piping Plovers.

Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge (also known as “Brigantine” or “Brig”) is one of the real gems of the whole region; its vast assemblage of salt and freshwater marshes, brackish impoundments, and upland forests are accessed by an 8-mile wildlife drive and overlooked by several observation towers. 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.



Clapper Rails are common in the marshes, but we generally don't see this many at one time! These rails were driven to high ground by winds that blew water in, flooding the marshes. At Cape May, we are always watching for interesting phenomena like this. Photograph by guide Tom Johnson.

Itinerary for Spring in Cape May

Day 1, Sun, 11 May. 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.*** 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 at the hotel front desk when you arrive.) 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, Mon-Fri, 12-16 May. Cape May and nearby areas. Our 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 weather, but during our stay we plan to visit all of the best spots in and near Cape May. On one of the days, we will take a three-hour boat tour of the back bay areas of Cape May and nearby Wildwood. From the comfortable, covered pontoon boat, we should get good looks at a variety of shorebirds, herons, and terns as well as up close and personal looks at nesting Ospreys.

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, Sat, 17 May. 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.

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

"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

Financial Information

FEE: \$3175 from Philadelphia/Cape May

DEPOSIT: \$325 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: November 12, 2024

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$700

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 \$3175 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 on the first and last days of the tour, boat trips, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, 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, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$700. 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.

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 \$325** 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 November 12, 2024. 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). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased.

Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

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 reverse side of 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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