



Field Guides Tour Report

**CAPE MAY MEGAN'S WAY II**

Oct 7, 2012 to Oct 13, 2012

Megan Crewe

*Enjoy our triplist below! For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please visit our [TOUR PAGE](#).*

There are few places in the world that rival Cape May for the sheer spectacle of migration -- and this tour hit an ideal week for that spectacle! Not one, but TWO big cold fronts roared through, and though that made for some mighty chilly picnic breakfasts, the fronts brought thousands and thousands of birds spilling south in their wakes. Flocks of sparrows kept the fields at Higbee's in constant motion, while restless groups of Pine Siskins (an irruptive migrant here) and American Goldfinches bounded from sunflower heads to nearby trees and back. Tree Swallows gathered in whirling tornadoes over the marshes -- or descended en masse into the bayberry bushes to strip them clean of berries. One morning, the rips off Cape May Point were alive with hundreds of gulls, terns and a few scattered Northern Gannets, wings flashing as they gobbled up fish disoriented by the meeting of the big currents from the ocean and the bay. We saw growing numbers of winter visitors (like Brant) as the week went by, while writhing lines of Double-crested Cormorants streamed by over the sea.



*The fun thing about a migration tour is that absolutely anything might show up. This year, it was a surprise Northern Wheatear, which apparently took a wrong turn on its flight south! (Photo courtesy of Mike Crewe)*

There were days when we literally couldn't point our binoculars in any direction without seeing multiple raptors (usually Sharp-shinned Hawks!) at once, days when the trees in suburban yards quivered with mixed feeding flocks, and days when Black Skimmers stood 300 strong on the beach right beside the town's

convention center. And who will soon forget that magic morning at Higbee's, when nearly 3,000 Yellow-rumped Warblers were counted at the official morning flight station, and scores of Eastern Phoebes pumped their tails on branches in every direction?! Despite the fact that we were nearing the tail end of the warbler migration, we had superb views of more than a dozen species, including an Ovenbird striding around in someone's back yard, a showy Black-throated Green flicking along the branch tips and a very late Prairie Warbler dancing in the sunshine at Higbee's. And a young Northern Wheatear with a very bad gyroscope provided a wonderful "up close and personal" encounter with a true vagrant -- one that scurried around nearly at our feet, chasing baby ghost crabs on the beach.

Thanks to all of you for joining me in my "backyard". It was great fun sharing the joy of migration birding with all of you! I hope to see you again in the field somewhere, some day. -- Megan

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**KEYS FOR THIS LIST**

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

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**BIRDS**

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**SNOW GOOSE** (*Chen caerulescens*) – A small flock snoozing at the far edge of the salt marsh at Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge was the first I've heard of this autumn.

**BRANT** (*Branta bernicla*) – Numbers of this winter visitor increased significantly during the week, from a group of 40 or so seen on our first visit to Stone Harbor to a flock of many hundred floating on Jarvis Sound during our back bay boat trip. We heard their crane-like calls while birding from the bridge onto Nummy Island.

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*)

**MUTE SWAN** (*Cygnus olor*) – Very common on the area's wetlands, with especially "up close and personal" studies of the hapless youngster we found trundling along the trail at the Meadows; he proved particularly inept at getting aloft, crashing into the port-a-loo at the end of the path. [1]

**WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) – Nice scope views of a little group paddling along the back side of one of the ponds at the entrance to Forsythe NWR, and flight views of a surprising group of 30 or so wheeling over the parking lot at the Cape May Point State Park our last morning.

**GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*)

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*)

**AMERICAN BLACK DUCK** (*Anas rubripes*) – Many scattered around the impoundment ponds at Forsythe NWR, including a preening bird that showed its distinctively dark speculum (with black rather than white borders) nicely.

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

**BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas discors*)

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*)

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*) – Especially common at Forsythe NWR, where we had hundreds of "butts" in view at once as they dabbled in the impoundment ponds. We had a handful of others at Cape May Point State Park and the Meadows.

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas crecca*)

**RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*) – One floated among the duckweed on Lake Lily, spotted as we exited the bird observatory one afternoon.

This is another winter visitor to Cape May.

**WHITE-WINGED SCOTER** (*Melanitta fusca*) – A female near the Coast Guard base in Cape May's harbor has been hanging around for nearly seven weeks, very much out of season. Fortunately for us, she's gotten used to Bob approaching with the Osprey, which allowed us nice close looks at that distinctive white wing patch -- on one wing, anyway.

**BLACK SCOTER** (*Melanitta americana*) – A male, his orange bill glowing against the dark sea, floated just offshore at Cape May Point on our first afternoon.

**RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – A few snoozed among the American Coots on Bunker Pond, but our biggest group -- hundreds strong -- floated on one of the inlets at Forsythe NWR. This is yet another winter visitor to Cape May.

#### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Quite common on Bunker Pond, with as many as a dozen seen floating or hunting on some days.

This species loses its distinctively pied bill once the breeding season is over.

#### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Daily, including some impressively large skeins wending their way south. Somehow, their flocks never seem quite as organized as goose flocks are.

#### Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

**GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) – Most days, including several small groups headed south over the state park, and a few hunched in the back bay salt marshes, seen on our boat trip.

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*)

**SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*)

**LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulea*) – An adult at Two Mile Landing proved most uncooperative, disappearing (except for an occasional glimpse of its head and neck) into tall *Spartina* grass shortly after we spotted it. Fortunately, a youngster with a big group of Snowy Egrets near the end of the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR was far more obliging, strolling around in the mudflats just off the road. Its pale, black-tipped bill helped us to quickly locate it among its flock mates.

**TRICOLORED HERON** (*Egretta tricolor*) – A trio flew in and landed on Nummy Island, keeping a careful eye on a Bald Eagle patrolling overhead, and a quartet arrived with a big group of Snowy Egrets a short while later. This species winters well south of New Jersey.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

#### Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*) – Far less common than the next species, though we did see a handful soaring over Cape May Point on most days. Their shorter tail, stubbier wings and white primary patches quickly separate them from the larger Turkey Vultures.

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*)

#### Pandionidae (Osprey)

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Very common throughout the week, including many carrying fish snacks -- and a couple that lost their dinners to marauding Bald Eagles!

#### Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Fine views on most days, with a wonderful four in the sky at once (two adults, two youngsters) on our last morning. Two adults chasing each other across the skies of Cape May Point as we watched our Northern Wheatear were particularly memorable.

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*) – Small numbers on most days, including a lovely gingery youngster floating over the marshes at the Meadows on our last afternoon, and a couple of migrating birds soaring high over Cape May Point State Park.

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*) – We hit a couple of big flight days for this species, where you literally couldn't point your binoculars anywhere in the sky where you couldn't see at least two or three at once. The hawk watch counted 1800-plus on the 12th and more than 2600 on the 11th!

**COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*)

**BROAD-WINGED HAWK** (*Buteo platypterus*) – Small numbers on several days, including a kettle of some 15 or so circling over Higbee's one morning. As usual, all of the birds we saw were youngsters.

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

#### Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*) – The least commonly seen of the three falcons, though we had great views of many coursing along the dunes at Cape May Point State Park, including one hovering for long minutes right near us.

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*)

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – Stellar views on most days, including one strafing the shorebird flocks on our back bay boat trip, a couple of youngsters sharing a sandbar with the oystercatchers at Stone Harbor and a big female making things nervous all over the impoundments at Forsythe NWR.

*Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)*

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*) – Small numbers at Cape May Point State Park on several days, the first vanguard of the hundreds which will overwinter there.

*Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)*

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Scores rested on a muddy island at Forsythe NWR, and others did the same on Champagne Island and several little islets in the back bays. Though we saw a few with spotty stomachs, most were already in their drab winter plumage.

**SEMPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Two pattered around on the big muddy island visible from the free bridge in Stone Harbor, dwarfed by the nearby Marbled Godwit and American Oystercatchers.

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*)

*Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)*

**AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER** (*Haematopus palliatus*) – A group of 250 or more rested at the tip of Champagne Island one afternoon, waiting out the high tide, and more snoozed along the stone jetty at the Cape May harbor entrance. Unusually for shorebirds, young oystercatchers stay with the parents for months after fledging.

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

**MARbled GODWIT** (*Limosa fedoa*) – One strode along the edge of a big mudflat near Nummy Island, looking quite peachy against the dark ground. This is a regular vagrant to Cape May county.

**Ruddy TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*)

**RED KNOT** (*Calidris canutus*) – A couple among a big mixed flock of Dunlin and Black-bellied Plovers on Champagne Island made for a bit of a "Where's Waldo" challenge.

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*) – Scurrying like wind-up toys along surf lines all across the county.

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*)

**DUNLIN** (*Calidris alpina*)

**SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus griseus*)

**WILSON'S SNIPE** (*Gallinago delicata*) – Some in the group spotted one whizzing past during our late afternoon visit to the Meadows.

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**LAUGHING GULL** (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Daily, including hundreds swarming over the rips south of Cape May Point one morning. This is south Jersey's most common breeding gull, but they all head to points south for the winter.

**RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*)

**HERRING GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*)

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus fuscus*) – A third year bird lurked among a group of Laughing Gulls along the surf line at the Cape May Point State Park late one morning, looming over his smaller cousins.

**GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus marinus*)

**CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – A few of these large terns -- biggest in the world -- flew back and forth over the impoundments at Forsythe NWR, and another hunted over the back bays behind Wildwood, seen on our boat trip.

**COMMON TERN** (*Sterna hirundo*) – A handful on the beach with the Forster's Terns, including one youngster that looked to be only recently fledged.

**FORSTER'S TERN** (*Sterna forsteri*) – Common throughout, with especially nice looks at many fishing in the channels right along the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR. Those "black eyes" are distinctive among wintering terns.

**ROYAL TERN** (*Thalasseus maximus*)

**BLACK SKIMMER** (*Rynchops niger*) – Hundreds gathered on the beach near the Cape May convention center each afternoon, often allowing very close approach. We were gratified to see many speckled youngsters among the flock; it looks like they've had a successful breeding season.

*Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)*

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) **[1]**

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – One on a wire -- and then trundling around in the road -- on Cape May Point allowed good scope study. This is a recent self-introduction to the area.

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*)

*Apodidae (Swifts)*

**CHIMNEY SWIFT** (*Chaetura pelagica*) – One flashed across the skies above Lake Lily while we visited the East Lake Drive "magic trees" one afternoon, giving quick looks to those who happened to be looking in the right direction.

*Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)*

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus colubris*) – Most of the group spotted one in the flowering bushes outside the Bella Vida restaurant on our chilly first afternoon.

*Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – Especially common at Higbee's, where we saw several nicely as they investigated the leafless Black Locust trees. The white circles in the wings of this species are distinctive in flight.

**YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – Seen all but our first afternoon -- sometimes multiples in the same tree. The broad white wing stripe on their folded wing is distinctive.

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides pubescens*)

**HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides villosus*)

**NORTHERN FLICKER** (*Colaptes auratus*) – Dozens bounded overhead each day, flashing those lovely golden underwings. We also had fine scope views of many sitting nervously in treetops, scanning for passing raptors.

#### *Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)*

**EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE** (*Contopus virens*) – One hunting -- and singing -- in the trees along the road outside the Cape May Bird Observatory proved obliging, allowing us to get good scope views.

**EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*) – These late-season migrants were almost ridiculously common on our first morning at Higbee's, where they wagged their tails on branches in every direction. Numbers dropped noticeably as the week went on.

#### *Vireonidae (Vireos)*

**RED-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo olivaceus*) – They were getting scarce by the time of this tour, but we did find a few gobbling berries from the Virginia Creeper vines at Higbee's.

#### *Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*

**BLUE JAY** (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Daily, including good numbers flapping past on their way south at Higbee's.

**AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

**FISH CROW** (*Corvus ossifragus*)

#### *Hirundinidae (Swallows)*

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Zillions, typically in huge swirling flocks over the dunes (or descending en masse into the bayberries for a berry snack). The numbers seen on most days were truly awe-inspiring.

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – A few mingled with the Tree Swallows over the beach at Cape May Point one afternoon.

#### *Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)*

**CAROLINA CHICKADEE** (*Poecile carolinensis*) – A little group rummaging through the trees near our picnic site in Forsythe NWR provided especially nice looks -- and had a few other species in tow.

**TUFTED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus bicolor*)

#### *Sittidae (Nuthatches)*

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta canadensis*) – I'm sure you'll find it hard to believe that some years we see only a handful of these northern visitors. That certainly wasn't the case this year, as scores bounced past overhead or crawled over trunks and branches all over Cape May.

**WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta carolinensis*) – One with a mixed flock at our Forsythe picnic spot, and several other fly-bys at Higbee's and Cape May Point State Park on our final morning. This species is uncommon south of the canal.

#### *Certhiidae (Treecreepers)*

**BROWN CREEPER** (*Certhia americana*)

#### *Troglodytidae (Wrens)*

**CAROLINA WREN** (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – Especially nice looks at a pair chortling from the bayberry bushes along Bunker Pond, with others seen -- and many heard -- at Higbee's.

**HOUSE WREN** (*Troglodytes aedon*) – One flicked through the brush pile at Cape May Point State Park, seen on several of our visits there.

#### *Regulidae (Kinglets)*

**GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus satrapa*) – Big numbers most days of the tour, swarming through cedar trees or hanging upside down from branches while inspecting for tidbits.

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*) – Far less common than the previous species, though we saw small numbers on most days.

#### *Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)*

**NORTHERN WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – This one was a real surprise, found by a British birder at the Meadows on our second morning. Though wheatears are rare vagrants (with the last recorded in Cape May county more than two decades ago), there's been a real influx of youngsters to the east coast this autumn.

#### *Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia sialis*) – A little group flashed around a yard near the entrance to Forsythe NWR, occasionally dropping to the ground to chase things there.

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*)

#### *Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)*

**GRAY CATBIRD** (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Great views on multiple occasions, as they scrambled about in the trees chomping berries. This is a very common migrant through Cape May.

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*)

**BROWN THRASHER** (*Toxostoma rufum*) – Common at Higbee's, where we had a couple sit up for long minutes in the sunshine, giving us great views. Their loud "thuck" calls were a regular part of the tour soundtrack.

#### *Sturnidae (Starlings)*

## **EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

### Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

**AMERICAN PIPIT** (*Anthus rubescens*) – A couple of flyovers came in off the water at Cape May Point State Park early one morning, calling their distinctive "pipit" call and showing their white outer tail feathers.

### Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

**CEDAR WAXWING** (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Our best views came one morning at Higbee's, when we had scope views of one little flock (mostly streaky youngsters) in a tree top. We saw far more flying swiftly past, calling their high-pitched "jingle bell" calls.

### Parulidae (New World Warblers)

**OVENBIRD** (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – One walking back and forth under some bushes in a Cape May Point backyard was a nice consolation prize for missing the "easy" Winter Wren.

**BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** (*Mniotilta varia*) – A couple of birds at Higbee's, and one near our picnic site at Forsythe NWR, all crawling along tree branches, searching intently for tidbits.

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*) – A couple of fine views at birds foraging low along the paths at Higbee's. This late autumn visitor is distinguished by its extreme drabness: field marks? what field marks?!

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Many skulked in the low vegetation along the field edges at Higbee's, and others did the same around Bunker Pond in the state park.

**AMERICAN REDSTART** (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Especially nice views of one youngster -- flirting its distinctive yellow tail patches -- in the trees outside the Cape May Bird Observatory late one morning.

**NORTHERN PARULA** (*Setophaga americana*) – One near our picnic spot at Forsythe NWR was particularly obliging, as was another feeding in the East Lake Drive magic trees. These little warblers really look stumpy-tailed in flight.

**MAGNOLIA WARBLER** (*Setophaga magnolia*) – One flitting around knee-high in a holly tree in a Cape May Point backyard gave us particularly nice views; we saw a scattering of others at Higbee's.

**CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER** (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) – Super studies of several around the fields at Higbee's, including one that dropped nearly to our feet in pursuit of some speedy prey item. The snowy white underparts on this chartreuse green bird -- and its habit of regularly cocking its long tail up -- help to quickly identify it.

**BLACKPOLL WARBLER** (*Setophaga striata*) – A couple rummaged high in some trees at Higbee's, searching for insects among the Virginia creeper berries. The combination of faintly streaked chest and streaky back -- plus strong wing bars and yellow feet -- is distinctive.

**BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – Lovely views of both males and females throughout the tour, including two handsome males side by side among the porcelain berries at Higbee's one morning. The white "pocket handkerchief" on the wing of both sexes is a useful identification feature.

**PALM WARBLER** (*Setophaga palmarum*) – Dozens. Scores. Hundreds! They waggled their way through sand dunes, along fence lines, across lawns, and in trees and bushes throughout the tour route. That steadily dipping tail is a great behavioral field mark.

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER** (*Setophaga coronata*) – If we had a dollar for every one we saw, we could probably have paid for everybody's trip - and had enough left over to buy a very fancy sports car! Nearly 5000 were recorded flying past the morning flight count station at Higbee's one morning.

**PRAIRIE WARBLER** (*Setophaga discolor*) – Some good spotting by a fellow birder netted us fine views of a still-bright male working along the edge of the first field at Higbee's one morning.

**BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER** (*Setophaga virens*) – One feeding in a tree along the edge of the first field at Higbee's performed beautifully, posing out in the open for long minutes -- great spotting, Sam!

### Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)

**EASTERN TOWHEE** (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) – As usual, heard far more frequently than seen, but some newly-arrived migrants proved cooperative our first morning at Higbee's, sitting in the open in bushes around the first field.

**CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*)

**CLAY-COLORED SPARROW** (*Spizella pallida*) – Two -- one foraging along the edge of Bunker Pond, a second among the mobs of sparrows in the fields at Higbee's. This is a regular autumn vagrant to Cape May.

**FIELD SPARROW** (*Spizella pusilla*)

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Especially common along the beaches and salt marshes, including several seen nicely on the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR.

**SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*) – Common throughout the week, with especially nice looks at a handful rummaging in the trail at the Meadows as we hiked out to see the wheatear.

**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolnii*) – All-too-brief glimpses of one twitching through a blanket of porcelain berry at Higbee's on our final morning.

**SWAMP SPARROW** (*Melospiza georgiana*) – After struggling to get much of a look at the mobs at the Meadows, we had fine views of one sitting for long minutes in a pond side weed near one of the platforms at the state park.

**WHITE-THROATED SPARROW** (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – Easily the most numerous of the week's sparrows, with scores in the fields at Higbee's. Most were drabber tan morph birds, though we did see one or two of the more striking white morphs.

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – Two adults feeding near the picnic pavilion in Cape May Point State Park one afternoon showed marvelously well, as did a youngster rummaging near the hawk watch platform.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO** (*Junco hyemalis*)

### Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

**SCARLET TANAGER** (*Piranga olivacea*) – A couple of winter-yellowed birds sat high in trees near the parking lot at Higbee's on our first morning.

**NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

**BLUE GROSBEAK** (*Passerina caerulea*) – A female, distinguished by her wingbars, made a brief appearance low in some bushes along the edge of the first field at Higbee's on our last morning.

**INDIGO BUNTING** (*Passerina cyanea*) – Fairly common in and around the weedy fields at Higbee's, including a few that sat up long enough to get a scope on. Though a few showed a blue feather or two, most were in their drab brown basic plumage.

*Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)*

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Big flocks rose periodically out of the reeds and goldenrod at Forsythe NWR before settling back in for another bout of feeding. Most appeared to be females or youngsters, though there were a few bright males around.

**EASTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella magna*) – A trio with a big flock of blackbirds at Forsythe NWR fled quickly in the wrong direction.

**BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus major*)

**BALTIMORE ORIOLE** (*Icterus galbula*) – A trio of youngsters -- including one rather orange male -- nibbled Virginia creeper berries high in a row of trees separating two fields at Higbee's.

*Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)*

**PURPLE FINCH** (*Carpodacus purpureus*) – Only a few got on our first, but another bird at Higbee's the following day proved far more cooperative, giving us all nice scope views of its distinctively striped face.

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) [I]

**PINE SISKIN** (*Spinus pinus*) – Plentiful around Cape May this year, with superb views of many feeding in the sunflower strips or perched in leafless bushes along the edges of the fields at Higbee Beach. And we saw many flocks bounding past on their way south!

**AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus tristis*)

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

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## **MAMMALS**

**EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Common throughout, including a few that just couldn't decide which side of the road they wanted to be on.

**MUSKRAT** (*Ondatra zibethica*) – Sam spotted one at Forsythe NWR.

**BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN** (*Tursiops truncatus*) – A pod surfaced repeatedly just offshore at Cape May Point State Park. This species spends its winters further south.

**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – A couple nibbling grass right beside the cars hurtling past on the Garden State Parkway were a surprise. Hopefully, they're traffic wise!

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## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

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**Totals for the tour: 136 bird taxa and 4 mammal taxa**