



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Cape May Megan's Way 2016**

Sep 24, 2016 to Sep 30, 2016  
Megan Edwards Crewe & Doug Gochfeld

*For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).*



*It's always a treat to see a Cape May Warbler in Cape May. Despite the name (the species was first collected here), it's not a particularly common species in the county. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

When it comes to fall migration in Cape May, it's all about the weather -- particularly the wind direction. In a perfect world, the week of our tour is dominated by massive cold fronts roaring down out of Canada, sweeping all the birds of the northern forests south before them and bringing clear, blue-sky days. Unfortunately, this year our week was instead dominated by relentless east winds and persistent rains. But this being Cape May, there was still plenty to look at -- even if it was a little soggy than we might have liked!

Among our top sightings were a trio of rails on a single day: a showy Clapper Rail that danced along the edges of the saltmarsh at Two Mile Landing, a confiding Sora foraging in shallow waters at the Meadows, and a furtive Virginia Rail that darted back and forth across open gaps in the reeds just behind the Sora. "Salty sparrows" also gave admirable performances, with Nelson's and Saltmarsh sparrows providing nice comparative studies as they perched, one after the other, in the Spartina grasses of Nummy Island, and a close Seaside Sparrow peering from the saltmarsh at Shell Bay Landing. A most out-of-place American Bittern huddled among the ivy leaves 20 feet up a big poplar tree, peering down at the hordes of birders admiring it from below. A couple of drake Eurasian Wigeons, regular vagrants to Cape May most winters now, floated among the other ducks on several area ponds. A Great Cormorant rested on a rocky jetty, mere feet from a trio of Double-crested Cormorants for easy comparison. A big mob of Black Skimmers -- more than 550 in all -- rested on the sands of Cape May's beach, or lifted, wings whirring and "poodle barks" echoing, into the air before resettling again. In all, we found 16 species of warblers, including a busy mob of Nashvilles bouncing in and out of the millet field at Higbee's, a late Blackburnian flicking through a cedar at Higbee's, a Cape May Warbler and the tour's only Black-throated Green in a mixed flock near CMBO's Northwood Center, and a Prairie Warbler flitting along the edge of the parking lot at Cape May Point SP. And who will soon forget the last minute excitement of Doug's spotting of the Western Kingbird, which perched on a roadside wire and drew ever-increasing numbers of excited birders as we watched.

Thanks so much for joining us for the week -- and for coping with the less-than-ideal conditions that plagued some of it. Your sharp-eyed spotting, humor and easy companionship made for a very pleasant week, despite the soggy! Doug and I hope to see you again soon on another adventure somewhere.

-- Megan

**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)

- CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Common and widespread, seen in good numbers every day of the tour -- including a honking mob descending on the ponds at the Meadows one evening, and a handful munching grass along the highway at the base of the Walt Whitman bridge.
- MUTE SWAN** (*Cygnus olor*) – Far, far too many of these beautiful invaders, which are causing serious problems in many of New Jersey's waterways. Too many swans = too much swan poop = serious eutrophication of area ponds and lakes! [I]
- WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) – Nice scope views of several handsome drakes preening near the far end of Bunker Pond late one afternoon, and a flyover at CMBO's Northwood Center one evening.
- GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*) – Small numbers floated among the other ducks on the ponds at the Meadows, including some drakes already sporting their breeding finery.
- EURASIAN WIGEON** (*Anas penelope*) – Our best views came at the Meadows, where we had a couple of red-headed males grubbing around in a shallow pond with a horde of Green-winged Teal. We had already seen one of these regular vagrants swimming back and forth at the feet of some drake Wood Ducks preening in Bunker Pond.
- AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*) – A handful preened or snoozed at the far end of Bunker Pond one afternoon, and others paddled around the center pond at the Meadows, including a couple of males which allowed nice comparison with the previous species.
- AMERICAN BLACK DUCK** (*Anas rubripes*) – Best seen at the Meadows, where one showed its dark speculum (deep blue with black borders -- and no white anywhere) to perfection as it preened. We had others floating on the Coast Guard ponds at Two Mile Landing.
- MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Daily, often in sizable numbers. Most of the males were still in eclipse plumage, only just starting to show traces of green on their heads.
- BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas discors*) – Good numbers at the Meadows one afternoon, with others on Bunker Pond. These were still in eclipse plumage, with nary a sign of a "crescent moon" in sight!
- NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*) – Small numbers on the ponds at the Meadows, including a close pair that allowed good views of their distinctively colored eyes -- gold for males, red-brown for females.
- NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*) – At least seven rested among the more plentiful Mallards on the main pond at the Meadows one afternoon. The all dark bills of this long-necked species makes them easy to pick out of the crowd.
- GREEN-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas crecca*) – Very common at the Meadows on our first afternoon's walk there, with dozens floating on the central pond, or prowling along the nearby mudflats. Though none were in colorful alternate plumage, their distinctive butterscotch undertail coverts were clearly visible.
- RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*) – One flew in and landed on Lake Lily while we puzzled over a nearby scaup. And why it wasn't named for its distinctively striped bill rather than the hard-to-see neck ring of breeding plumaged males will forever be a mystery!
- GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*) – A drake, still largely in eclipse plumage, had us scratching our heads for a bit, but the wide black tip to its bill helped seal its identification.
- COMMON EIDER** (*Somateria mollissima*) – One did its very best Herring Gull imitation, lurking among a mixed gull and tern flock on a Cape May Point beach. At close range, its "plain brown" plumage proves to be anything but -- instead, it's a panoply of vermiculations and feather edge scalloping!
- SURF SCOTER** (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – An adult male and a youngster (which had a dull gray bill and no facial markings) floated in the sea just off a jetty in Cape May Point one morning -- conveniently close to a couple of Black Scoters for good comparison.
- BLACK SCOTER** (*Melanitta americana*) – A line of a dozen or so males and one female winged past as we birded Stone Harbor Point one afternoon, and we saw another couple of males floating in the surf at Cape May Point.
- RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – One floated on Lake Lily, sticking close to a Greater Scaup.

### Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

- WILD TURKEY** (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – A trio in a field on our drive back up to the Philadelphia airport provided our last new bird for the trip. This species has made a tremendous comeback in New Jersey.

### Gaviidae (Loons)

- COMMON LOON** (*Gavia immer*) – A couple of flybys over Stone Harbor Point one afternoon (necessitating some van gymnastics, since we'd just pulled away from our parking spot), with another flyby over the bay as we headed south from Lake Champlain.

### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

- DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Regular throughout, including a few migrating flocks passing overhead -- the vanguard of the hordes that will be heading south in the coming weeks. The ones we saw drying out on posts and seawalls around Jarvis Sound (on our boat trip) probably gave us our closest views.
- GREAT CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – A white-chinned adult resting on the south jetty at the Cape May Harbor, right next to a trio of Double-crested Cormorants, was one of the final highlights of our boat trip on the Osprey.

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

- AMERICAN BITTERN** (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) – One sitting in a clump of ivy a good 20 feet up a poplar tree was a surprise -- presumably for the bird as well as for us! It looked a bit nonplussed by the gathering crowd, doing a couple of incongruous "I'm just a swaying reed" imitations that looked completely out of place among the green ivy leaves.
- GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) – Seen on most days, including a flock of nine heading south over CMBO's Northwood Center our first evening.
- GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*) – Regular in wetlands all across the county.
- SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*) – Abundant throughout, including dozens sprinkled in trees along the edge of a lake on the Garden State Parkway, and others huddled on the saltmarsh pans around Jarvis Sound on our rainy boat trip.
- LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulea*) – A couple of individuals -- both adults -- stalked along the edges of puddles on Nummy Island.

**TRICOLORED HERON** (*Egretta tricolor*) – One hunted along the back edge of the main pan at the Wetlands Institute, and another made a windblown descent into saltmarsh near an apartment building in Wildwood Crest.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A gaggle stood on posts at the Wetlands Institute one afternoon, others huddled among a cedar grove on our boat trip, and a group of a dozen or so exploded from the trees edging Lake Lily on our last morning, "quock"-ing as they fled.

**YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – We spotted a few sprinkled among the far more common Black-crowned Night-Herons at the Wetlands Institute, with others seen from The Osprey on our boat trip -- including one youngster hunting a bank right beside us along the edge of a channel.

#### Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*) – Somehow, we managed to miss these one day -- though, of course, it was practically a monsoon that day! We had nice overhead views of several, showing well their flight profile and the distinctive white patches near their wingtips, at CMPSP.

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*) – Daily, including some in good comparison with the previous species over the parking lot at CMPSP.

#### Pandionidae (Osprey)

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Abundant throughout, including one munching on a fish it had caught at Cox Hall Creek WMA, and dozens flying past carrying snacks. This species migrates past Cape May in big numbers.

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

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*) – A youngster, identified by its cinnamon-colored underparts, quartered low over the marshes at the Meadows one afternoon.

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*) – We saw considerably fewer than we do most years (darn those northeast winds!), but still managed to get good studies of these small Accipiters on most days of the trip.

**COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Also seen most days, including some kettling with the previous species over the CMPSP parking lot, and a big female powering over the fallow fields behind our Western Kingbird at the Rae farm.

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Seen on most days, including fine views of the local pair noisily escorting an adult interloper off the island on our first evening (above CMBO's Northwood Center), and a couple of bullying birds chasing Ospreys around, trying to get their fish.

**BROAD-WINGED HAWK** (*Buteo platypterus*) – A few lost youngsters circled over CMPSP our first morning, and a couple of others soared over Higbee's the next day. Most of the birds seen in Cape May are youngsters; adults learn to stick to the ridges!

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Scattered birds, including a few soaring over CMPSP our first day (part of those oh-so-high kettles of birds), a youngster circling over Higbee's, and one perched in a tree near the Cape May County airport.

#### Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

**CLAPPER RAIL (ATLANTIC COAST)** (*Rallus crepitans crepitans*) – Wow! A wet morning yielded super views of a couple of these often-skulking birds -- one trotted around on the roadside (until a passing car scared it back into the reeds) and a second bird stepped, calling occasionally, along the edge of a muddy channel at Two Mile Landing.

**VIRGINIA RAIL** (*Rallus limicola*) – A skulking bird at the Meadows proved a bit uncooperative, showing pretty well for some and not at all for others. It darted back and forth across a gap in the reeds a few times, and then made a brief appearance along the edge of a channel before melting back into the background.

**SORA** (*Porzana carolina*) – This rail, on the other hand, was a delight, striding about in the open at the Meadows as it foraged in the shallows. There were two, though one was definitely more confiding than the other.

#### Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

**AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER** (*Haematopus palliatus*) – Common throughout, including a little family group -- two adults, two youngsters -- huddled on the Surf Avenue jetty on a windy morning, many scuttling along the beaches at Stone Harbor Point, and a big group on the beach at the Coast Guard base, seen on our back bay boat trip.

#### Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Small numbers early in the trip (including a few flying past the CMPSP hawkwatch, flashing their black "armpits"), but our biggest numbers came on our very rainy day, when we found dozens sheltering on a playing field in Avalon and hundreds at the Cape May County airport.

**SEMPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Dozens at Stone Harbor Point (including some disguising themselves as lumps of mud on the shore of the lagoon), with others near the base of the jetty at the Avalon seawatch.

**PIPING PLOVER** (*Charadrius melodus*) – A single bird huddled among some weedy vegetation on the beach near the Second Avenue jetty, trying hard to stay out of the wind. Most Piping Plovers are long gone by the time of our tours.

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Several small groups flew over CMPSP's parking lot on our first morning, shouting their onomatopoeic calls. We saw others trotting around in a plowed field near the Rae farm.

#### Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*) – One trotted along a cross brace on a seawall at one of the Cape May harbor marinas, keeping company with a group of Ruddy Turnstones.

**SOLITARY SANDPIPER** (*Tringa solitaria*) – A single bird (appropriately!) foraged along the back edge of a retention pond beside a Wawa convenience store, allowing fine scope studies. What a fortuitous restroom stop!

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – A few huddled on islands of grass in the pans at the Wetlands Institute, and others did the same on Nummy Island. We saw a few more at the Meadows, and the species was probably the most common shorebird on our boat trip.

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*) – A little group of 8 or so dropped into the Meadows one afternoon, and another handful hung with the plovers at the Cape May County airport.

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*) – A few snoozed among the rocks on a jetty at Stone Harbor Point (allowing nice comparison between adult and juvenile plumages), and we saw others resting on the walls protecting the marinas in Cape May harbor.

**RED KNOT** (*Calidris canutus*) – A little gang of them -- already in their drab, gray, winter plumage -- foraged busily on a flooded ball field in Avalon.



**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*) – By far the most common shorebird of the trip. A group preened and snoozed on the jetty at Stone Harbor Point, and others scurried up and down the beaches at Cape May and Cape May Point.

**DUNLIN** (*Calidris alpina*) – A few mixed with the Sanderlings on jetties and beaches across the county, looking rather plain and mouse-brown.

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*) – A single bird stood on a mud bar with a Short-billed Dowitcher, seen from the Osprey on our boat trip.

**PECTORAL SANDPIPER** (*Calidris melanotos*) – Our first was a calling flyover, silhouetted against gray clouds at Two Mile Landing. Fortunately, we found another quartet huddled with some Lesser Yellowlegs on a windy afternoon at the Meadows.

**SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER** (*Calidris pusilla*) – Small numbers among the Sanderlings on Stone Harbor Point's beach, with others at the Meadows. This is the most common of the peeps that transit through New Jersey.

**WESTERN SANDPIPER** (*Calidris mauri*) – A few with the Semipalmated Sandpipers on the jetty at Stone Harbor Point; even when they were asleep with their longer bills tucked, we could still pick them out by the line of rusty scapular feathers -- after some practice, that is!

**SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus griseus*) – A few rummaged along the edges of the muddy channels around Jarvis Sound, seen on our back bay boat trip, and others foraged on the flooded ball field in Avalon.

**WILSON'S SNIBE** (*Gallinago delicata*) – Two flew past as we birded the Meadows one afternoon, their long bills silhouetted against the gray sky. Their all dark backs identified them as snipe; dowitchers would have had white wedges up their backs.

#### *Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)*

**PARASITIC JAEGER** (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – An acrobatic individual chased several hapless terns over the Delaware Bay, forcing them to drop their catches.

#### *Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**LAUGHING GULL** (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Abundant throughout, seen on every beach (and many parking lots) in just about every imaginable plumage -- though none still had the full black head of breeding plumaged adults.

**RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*) – A few scattered among the more common species on various beaches. Ring-billed Gulls overwinter in big numbers in Cape May, but most haven't arrived yet.

**HERRING GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – Also common, and in big numbers, with plenty of chocolate-brown youngsters among the many adults.

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus fuscus*) – Two -- an adult and a crisply marked juvenile -- along the surf's edge at the Lincoln Avenue dune crossing allowed great scope studies. This species is smaller, leaner, and longer-winged than the next species.

**GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus marinus*) – Very, very common across the county, including a mob roosting on the beach across from our hotel. This is the world's largest gull.

**CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – And this is its largest tern! We had small numbers on most days, including some hunting the surf line at Stone Harbor Point and the Avalon seawatch.

**COMMON TERN** (*Sterna hirundo*) – Still pretty common around the county (some years, most are already gone by the time our tours start) with especially nice looks at some on the beach near our hotel -- where we could directly compare them with the next species.

**FORSTER'S TERN** (*Sterna forsteri*) – Dozens and dozens along the county's beaches, and on its back bays and saltmarshes, including a little gang plunge-diving near where we parked at Two Mile Landing.

**ROYAL TERN** (*Thalasseus maximus*) – Great studies of 30 or so -- including a begging youngster -- on Cape May's beach, not far from the snoozing skimmers, with others hunting above the crashing surf on various other beaches.

**BLACK SKIMMER** (*Rynchops niger*) – Our best views came on Cape May's beach, where we found a roosting flock of nearly 550 resting on the sand. A satisfying number of them were checker-backed youngsters.

#### *Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)*

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Common throughout, including some roosting each night on the roof of the hotel next to ours. [H]

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaidura macroura*) – Daily, with dozens perched on wires along every road we drove. Those cleaning up the spilled seeds under the feeders at CMBO's Northwood Center gave us particularly good views.

#### *Cuculidae (Cuckoos)*

**YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus americanus*) – One twitched through the underbrush in a scrub island at Higbee's one morning, showing itself in bits and pieces. That rusty wing panel distinguishes this species from the rarer (in Cape May anyway) Black-billed Cuckoo -- as, of course, does the yellow bill!

#### *Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)*

**COMMON NIGHTHAWK** (*Chordeiles minor*) – One hunted high above the CMBO's Northwood Center on the first evening of the tour.

#### *Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)*

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus colubris*) – A duo jostled over the feeders hanging from Michael and Louise's front porch, while a less confrontational bird sipped from sage flowers right beside our van.

#### *Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Nearly every day, including one on a post among the night-herons at the Wetlands Institute, one on a telephone wire at Two Mile Landing, and a duo chasing each other around near the canal bridge, seen on our back bay boat trip.

#### *Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – Singles around CMBO's Northwood Center (where our first was hitching its way up a big Siberian Elm tree over the building), with others at Higbee's and Cox Hall Creek.

**YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – One hitched its way up several tree trunks near the parking lot at Cox Hall Creek WMA -- great spotting, Cheryl! The big white slashes on the wings of the sapsuckers are distinctive.

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides pubescens*) – Our first was a little male hammering on a skinny tree along the road in front of the Northwood Center, part of a little gang of birds working the road edge on our first evening. We saw others at Higbee's, the Beanery ("a bird, finally a bird!"), and Cox Hall Creek.

**HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides villosus*) – One flew north over the parking lot at Higbee's one morning, calling loudly as it went past.

**NORTHERN FLICKER** (*Colaptes auratus*) – If we had a nickel for everyone we saw, we could nearly have financed a trip! They were EVERYWHERE!

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*) – Our best looks probably came at the Cape May County Airport, where a quartet of them chased each other (and various dragonflies) across the runways or perched on the directional signs. We saw others throughout the week, particularly over the CMPSP parking lots.

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – A common migrant through Cape May, with especially nice views of several rocketing over CMBO's Northwood Center, and others zooming over the CMPSP parking lot.

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – Gratifyingly common, including four sitting on the beach together at Stone Harbor Point (definitely putting the kibosh on seeing shorebirds there) with many others strafing the beaches and parking lots at CMPSP.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

**EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE** (*Contopus virens*) – Only some of the group spotted our first -- just outside CMBOS's Northwood Center on our first morning. Fortunately, we found another perched up at Higbee's one morning. [a]

**ALDER FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax alnorum*) – Overall shape, primary length, and eyering made this a "Trail's" Flycatcher, and probability made us call it an Alder. The end of September is getting pretty late for the very similar Willow Flycatcher.

**EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*) – A couple of birds hunted the field edges between the pond and our vehicle at the Beanery (not far from where we heard the titmice) and others flashed over the millet fields at Higbee's the following day. This is one of the last flycatchers to migrate through Cape May each fall.

**WESTERN KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – This one was certainly a surprise! Doug spotted one flash up to the telephone wires outside the Rae Farm stand as we headed back to our hotel on our final morning. The species is a regular vagrant to Cape May, typically showing up in small numbers most autumns.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

**WHITE-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo griseus*) – Spectacular views of a "Brown-eyed White-eyed Vireo" -- a youngster with irises that hadn't yet changed color -- at Higbee Beach WMA one morning.

**WARBLING VIREO** (*Vireo gilvus*) – One worked along the edge of Lake Lily on our final morning, part of a big mixed flock. It spent most of its time on the far side of the junipers, but occasionally popped out into the open -- like it did when it worked its way through the little willow tree in a convenient gap.

**RED-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo olivaceus*) – By far the most common of the tour's vireos, seen well nearly every day.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

**BLUE JAY** (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Common and widespread -- and noisy! The little gangs flying back and forth across the fields and along the hedgerows at Higbee's were particularly apparent.

**AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Regular throughout, including noisy groups over Higbee's on several mornings.

**FISH CROW** (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Also common, particularly along the coast; we had our best looks at some along Cape May's beach as we enjoyed our close encounter with the Black Skimmers. This species is smaller than the previous one, with a distinctively nasal call.

Alaudidae (Larks)

**HORNED LARK** (*Eremophila alpestris*) – A handful flicked through the short grass at the Cape May County airport, or sat on various runway signs.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Thousands and thousands and THOUSANDS flowed past us at Cape May NWR's Two Mile unit, making us feel a little like we were standing in a snow globe. We had plenty of these every day, but that was a pretty special encounter!

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

**CAROLINA CHICKADEE** (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Daily, including the regular gang around CMBO's Northwood Center -- which we kept visiting because they often had migrant hangers-on in tow!

**TUFTED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – A family group of four showed nicely at Higbee's, coming in close after I whistled their song back to them; we had more great looks at Cox Hall Creek WMA, where a big, noisy group flitted through the trees around the parking lot.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta canadensis*) – Small numbers on most days, with especially nice views of one with the big titmouse flock at Cox Hall Creek, and of others around CMBO's Northwood Center.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

**BROWN CREEPER** (*Certhia americana*) – One crept up the trunks of the stunted pine trees edging the parking lot at Stone Harbor Point -- clearly a migrant, given how far away the next trees were!

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

**HOUSE WREN** (*Troglodytes aedon*) – Everybody heard the raspy little calls of this species at Higbee's one morning, but (unfortunately) only your leaders actually laid eyes on it. [\*]

**MARSH WREN** (*Cistothorus palustris*) – One flicked through the reeds at the edge of a channel at the Meadows, distracting us briefly from our search for rails.

**CAROLINA WREN** (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – Very common and widespread, though (as usual) MANY more were heard than seen. Some of the birds at Higbee's proved especially cooperative.

Poliopitilidae (Gnatcatchers)

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Poliopitila caerulea*) – Our first was little more than a flashing gray and white dot, high over the CMPSP parking lot one morning. Fortunately, we had much better views of another in a mixed flock working along the edge of Lake Lily on the last day of the tour.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*) – Scattered individuals, including one working along the edge of the main clearing at Cape May Point SP one morning. The eye-catching wing flick of this species is a good behavioral ID clue.

*Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia sialis*) – A male flicked from telephone wire to pole insulator to pine tree near the Cape May County airport, just above our Chipping Sparrow flock. What gorgeous color!

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) – Only a few seen on the tour -- some in flight over the fields at Higbee's one morning, and others sitting on telephone wires (or scurrying around on the grassy roadsides) at the southern end of Stone Harbor.

*Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)*

**GRAY CATBIRD** (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Very common and widespread, particularly at Higbee's. The distinctive calls of this species were a regular part of the tour soundtrack.

**BROWN THRASHER** (*Toxostoma rufum*) – Our first was a showy bird in some scrubby bushes along the edge of the Cape May Point SP parking lot, and, on our first morning at Higbee's, they proved to be almost ridiculously common. Later in the tour, they were less confiding, and we heard more than we saw -- their distinctive loud "chuck" and mewling calls were regular at Higbee's.

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Common throughout, including several territorial pairs around the big parking lot at Cape May Point SP.

*Sturnidae (Starlings)*

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Abundant and widespread. [1]

*Bombycillidae (Waxwings)*

**CEDAR WAXWING** (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Small, calling flocks passed overhead on several days. Their uniform color, high-pitched calls, and distinctively tipped tails (those bright yellow bands!) help to identify them.

*Parulidae (New World Warblers)*

**BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** (*Mniotilta varia*) – Regular in small numbers throughout the tour, with especially nice studies of a few crawling through the trees around CMBO's Northwood Center.

**NASHVILLE WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*) – Quite common in the fields at Higbee's, where they flitted from scrubby trees to millet seed heads and back again.

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*) – And if the last species was "quite common", then this one was abundant -- particularly in those millet fields at Higbee's!

**AMERICAN REDSTART** (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Another regular species in small numbers, with particularly good studies of several in the mixed flock that frequented the trees around the Northwood Center. All of the birds we saw were in female-type plumage, with nary an adult male to be seen.

**CAPE MAY WARBLER** (*Setophaga tigrina*) – Our first was a very drab first-year female foraging outside CMBO's Northwood Center. We had another along the edge of the parking lot at Cape May Point SP, and a couple more in the stunted pines near the parking lot at Stone Harbor Point.

**NORTHERN PARULA** (*Setophaga americana*) – Daily, often in surprisingly big numbers. Most of the birds we saw were youngsters.

**MAGNOLIA WARBLER** (*Setophaga magnolia*) – Michael and I were the only ones who spotted this species on our first encounter -- a little female that was flicking through the junipers (in the pouring rain) outside the Northwood Center. Fortunately, she was still there the next day, when the weather was slightly more conducive to actually seeing her!

**BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER** (*Setophaga fusca*) – One twitched through a tree at Higbee's, among the very first birds we saw after breakfast there one morning.

**YELLOW WARBLER** (*Setophaga petechia*) – Small numbers on most days, including one flitting through the goldenrod plants growing on the Cape May beach, seen as we walked back to the van after checking out the skimmers.

**BLACKPOLL WARBLER** (*Setophaga striata*) – Especially nice views of several around CMBO's Northwood Center, with others at Higbee's. One of the (few) good things about east winds is that we see plenty of these long-distance migrants -- which are typically passing by well offshore!

**BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – A somewhat elusive male at Stone Harbor Point was followed by a much more cooperative male at Higbee's one morning. And we had great studies of a female with a mixed flock along the Lake Lily shore on our last morning, as she foraged low in the junipers mere yards from where we stood.

**PALM WARBLER** (*Setophaga palmarum*) – Another common and widespread species, particularly in the dunes, and along the edges of Higbee's millet fields. The tail-wagging behavior of this ground-loving species was much in evidence!

**PINE WARBLER** (*Setophaga pinus*) – We found one in (appropriately) the pines along the beach at Cape May Point while we were walking to where the Common Eider had been seen.

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER** (*Setophaga coronata*) – Only a few folks saw our first, as it twitched through the trees along the north end of Lake Lily. Fortunately, we had much better looks at a flock of a dozen or so on our last morning at the same location. This is the predominant wintering warbler in Cape May county.

**PRAIRIE WARBLER** (*Setophaga discolor*) – We found our first with the mixed warbler flock along the north edge of Lake Lily, and another along the fringes of the parking lot at Cape May Point SP.

**BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER** (*Setophaga virens*) – One with a mixed warbler flock outside CMBO's Northwood Center was a nice treat our first afternoon -- great spotting, Michael!

*Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)*

**NELSON'S SPARROW** (*Ammodramus nelsoni*) – Wow! Seeing one of these at point-blank range on Nummy Island, only minutes after seeing the next species, was pretty special! We had a lovely "interior" bird, with bright orange facial markings and chest wash.

**SALTMARSH SPARROW** (*Ammodramus caudacutus*) – These were the ones that started things off -- a couple of these somewhat drabber "sharp-tailed" sparrows perched up in the taller *Spartina* grasses on Nummy Island, peering around as we ogled them from the road.

**SEASIDE SPARROW** (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – One halfway up the taller *Spartina* grass at Shell Bay was cooperative, sitting for long minutes and allowing scope views; the one we saw first on Nummy Island was decidedly less confiding!

**CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*) – A little gang of these small sparrows hopped around in the grass near the Lower Township fire department, occasionally leaping up to grab a grass seed head for consumption.

**FIELD SPARROW** (*Spizella pusilla*) – A couple of birds perched high on leafless branches at the edge of an island of trees at Higbee's allowed scope studies from across the field. These small sparrows look quite blank-faced.

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – A few along the dunes at Cape May Point SP, with others at the Meadows and Stone Harbor Point. This is a common migrant and winter visitor in Cape May county.

**SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*) – Numbers flicked through the scrubby growth along the edges of the track down to the beach at Stone Harbor Point, sometimes allowing good comparison with the previous species. We saw others at Shell Bay and the Meadows.

**SWAMP SPARROW** (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Especially common in the fields at Higbee's, where they flashed in and out of the scrubby bushes along the edges, or perched on millet heads, gobbling up the ripening seeds. We saw others at the Meadows.

**EASTERN TOWHEE** (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) – Many were heard calling as we walked through the dune forest towards the beach at Cape May NWR's Two Mile unit. Those towards the back of the line spotted a male perched up atop a bush en route.

#### Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

**NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Common and widespread, including some very handsome males and lots of scruffy youngsters.

**ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK** (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – We heard the distinctive "sneaker squeak" call of this species at Higbee's one morning, but never caught up with the bird. [I]

**BLUE GROSBEAK** (*Passerina caerulea*) – A brown female (or youngster) sitting atop a sorghum head at Higbee's was a treat; it's getting late for this species by the time of our tours.

**INDIGO BUNTING** (*Passerina cyanea*) – Common along the field edges at Higbee's, where dozens flitted from scrubby trees to weedy fields and back as we walked the trails. All were wearing their brown winter plumage, with nary a blue male in sight.

#### Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

**BOBOLINK** (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – Our stop for the Western Kingbird produced an unexpected bonus when one of these (seen earlier in the tour only as calling flyovers) landed on a wire not far from where the kingbird had first appeared.

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Seen mostly in flight; this species is a very common diurnal migrant over southern Cape May.

**COMMON GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Regular in small numbers over various spots we birded.

**BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus major*) – One "singing" from a telephone wire at Two Mile Landing allowed nice scope studies, and we got close to others on Nummy Island and on our boat trip.

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*) – A busy mob of these brood parasites bathed in a muddy puddle near the Cape May County airport.

**BALTIMORE ORIOLE** (*Icterus galbula*) – A female (or youngster) rummaged through the big Siberian Elm over CMBO's Northwood Center, and another did the same at Higbee's. We also saw an adult male perched briefly atop a hedgerow at Higbee's one morning.

#### Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Small groups in flight in many places, with a handful of perched birds seen at Higbee's and in various spots around Cape May Point. Conjunctivitis has had a definite impact on numbers of House Finches in southern New Jersey. [I]

**AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus tristis*) – Particularly common around the millet fields at Higbee's, where many -- all in their duller, nonbreeding plumage -- foraged in trees along the central path.

#### Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Daily, including some keeping us company at the Philadelphia airport, and others seen daily around our hotel. [I]

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## MAMMALS

**EASTERN COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – A few flashed across the road in front of our van on some of our early morning drives to breakfast spots.

**EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Very common all around Cape May county.

**MUSKRAT** (*Ondatra zibethica*) – One paddled past the metal bridge at the Meadows -- good spotting, Leslie! It disappeared under an overhanging bank with a flip of its tail.

**BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN** (*Tursiops truncatus*) – We saw a few regularly-surfacing fins offshore at Stone Harbor Point, with even more slicing the waves off Cape May Point SP. This species is common in the summer, and its numbers build dramatically in the fall, as pods stage in and around the Delaware Bay before heading south for the winter.

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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**Totals for the tour: 152 bird taxa and 4 mammal taxa**