



Field Guides Tour Report

CAPE MAY MEGAN'S WAY II 2016

Oct 2, 2016 to Oct 8, 2016
Megan Edwards Crewe & Cory Gregory

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



Gray Catbirds are among the more common migrants through Cape May each fall. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Cape May is justly famous as an autumn migration hotspot, ranking among the top locations anywhere in the world. Fortunately or unfortunately (depending on the winds), a lot of its prominence comes from its location at the bottom of a peninsular "funnel" -- and if the winds are from the wrong direction, there isn't much of a funnel effect! Migration was a mixed bag during our week. Some species, such as the ubiquitous Tree Swallows that gathered in huge, sweeping swarms, or the kettles full of Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks that spun overhead, or the hordes of White-throated, Song and Swamp sparrows that hopped and fluttered and chirped and scratched along the edges of the open fields at Higbee's one morning, gave us a taste of what a "big day" can be like. But easterly winds meant that some other days were considerably quieter, like things tend to be on east winds. Fortunately, there's always something to look at in Cape May!

Among our top sightings were a trio of "salty sparrows" -- a close Seaside Sparrow hitching up Spartina stems at Shell Bay Landing, and Saltmarsh and Nelson's sparrows appearing in quick succession on Nummy Island. A female Blue Grosbeak gobbled sorghum seeds, conveniently close to winter-dulled Indigo Buntings for easy comparison. An American Bittern stalked the edge of Bunker Pond, and another gave us a short, sweet view of its two-toned wings as it flushed out of a field in front of us and flapped off over the trees. 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. Two Wilson's Snipes poked industriously at mud along the edge of puddle. Handsome Brown Thrashers shared berrying bushes with retiring Swainson's Thrushes and brash Gray Catbirds. Lesser Black-backed Gulls lurked among their larger cousins. A White-rumped Sandpiper scuttled through shallow water. A Clapper Rail crept along the edge of a marsh, then plunged in and swam across a channel. In all, we found 17 species of warblers, including a very late male Golden-winged, some knee-high Black-throated Blues flitting along the edge of the road, an Orange-crowned hunting along a weedy field edge, a skulking (but ultimately showy) Mourning Warbler, and a bright male Pine Warbler that danced through through the pine needles from sunshine to shadow and back.

Thanks so much for joining us for some top-class birding -- and eating! Your fine companionship made for a very pleasant week. Cory and I hope to see you in the field again somewhere soon.

-- 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

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

- BRANT** (*Branta bernicla*) – A single bird flew past, low over the water off Cape May on our first afternoon, the vanguard of the thousands which will descend on the county for the winter -- nice spotting, Ann!
- CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Common and widespread every day; very few of these bother to migrate anymore.
- MUTE SWAN** (*Cygnus olor*) – Unfortunately, these big, beautiful birds are FAR too common in Cape May -- as the flock of more than 35 on Lighthouse Pond one afternoon showed. The nutrient load from their copious droppings are causing havoc with area wetland ecosystems, particularly on Cape May Point. [I]
- WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) – A group of four winged past at Higbee's one morning, and we saw others over Cape May Point SP. The long tail and blocky head of this species is distinctive.
- EURASIAN WIGEON** (*Anas penelope*) – One male floated among the dabbling ducks on Bunker Pond, easily picked out by his rusty red head. This species is now a regular winter vagrant in Cape May.
- AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*) – Small numbers floated on Bunker Pond, or preened and snoozed along its edges on several days, including a few males in nice comparison with the previous species there.
- AMERICAN BLACK DUCK** (*Anas rubripes*) – We saw a few sleeping birds tucked in among the clumps of Spartina at the Wetlands Institute, but our best views came at Two Mile Landing, where 20 or so floated on the Coast Guard ponds -- until they lifted off in a flurry of wings, that is.
- MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Every day but the first -- and we probably just weren't concentrating hard enough on our way down from the airport! This is typically the most common duck in Cape May for much of the year.
- BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas discors*) – A little group of them mingled with the wigeons at the far end of Bunker Pond one morning, and another trio floated on one of the ponds at The Meadows.
- NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*) – A few floated on Bunker Pond one morning, and we found another trio on the shallow pond at the Rea Farm while admiring the snipes. Males were just starting to show traces of their breeding finery -- but their yellow eyes helped separate them from the red-brown eyed females.
- NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*) – We saw a small raft of these Arctic breeders floating off Shell Bay.
- RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*) – One on Lake Lily was quite active, spending most of its time underwater diving after food.
- GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*) – One floated on Lake Lily, in the company of a Ruddy Duck and a Ring-necked Duck. This was an early bird; most Greater Scaup don't arrive until much later in the autumn.
- COMMON EIDER** (*Somateria mollissima*) – One paddled around in the sea near the concrete ship. It REALLY wanted to come to shore, but clueless passing walkers kept chasing it back into the surf.
- SURF SCOTER** (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – Two floated close to shore just off the Coral Avenue dune crossover, providing nice comparison with some nearby Black Scoters. We saw another single bird on our back bay boat trip.
- BLACK SCOTER** (*Melanitta americana*) – A small group of males and a single female floated near the jetty off Coral Avenue, and several small flocks winged past the Avalon seawatch. Later in the fall, this species will migrate past Cape May by the tens of thousands.
- RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – A single bird floated on Lake Lily (never straying far from a fellow Greater Scaup), and a quartet snoozed on Bunker Pond one morning.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

- WILD TURKEY** (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – A group of five foraged along the edge of the highway, seen on our drive down from the Philadelphia Airport.

Gaviidae (Loons)

- COMMON LOON** (*Gavia immer*) – Two fairly distant birds flew past Stone Harbor Point one afternoon, and another circled over the sandy point there, seen from our vantage point on Nummy Island.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

- GREAT CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – One actively hunting near the concrete ship was among our last new birds for the tour. On the few brief seconds it surfaced each time, we caught quick glimpses of its distinctively white chin, and its lack of orange lores.
- DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Very common during our stay, with wavering skeins of them raveling and unraveling across the skies on several days.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

- BROWN PELICAN** (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – A single, very distant bird flew past just over the water, far out towards the horizon at Stone Harbor Point. If it wasn't for that enormous beak (and the very slow wing flap), it might have been a challenge to identify it!

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

- AMERICAN BITTERN** (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) – Our first flushed off the path ahead of us at Higbee's; it flew to the other side of the field and dropped into the vegetation and out of view. We flushed it again later, and got an even longer view of it as it circled once around the field before heading off over the trees. We saw another hunting along the edge of Bunker Pond later the same day.
- GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) – Daily, including a little group flapping slowly over our hotel on the first evening of the tour and several scattered through the saltmarshes of the back bay, seen on our boat trip.
- GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*) – Common throughout, including some in nice comparison with the next species on the muddy banks of Two Mile Landing.
- SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*) – Especially common at Two Mile Landing, where dozens were scattered along the edges of the channels, with others on Nummy Island and in the back bay saltmarshes.
- LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulea*) – A few adults stalked around the shallow pond at the Wetlands Institute.
- TRICOLORED HERON** (*Egretta tricolor*) – A single bird hunted the saltmarsh beyond the shallow pond at the Wetlands Institute, then flew in to check out one of the little islets right near the parking lot. We saw a few others on our back bay boat trip.
- GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*) – One flew past over Higbee's one morning, calling as it went. Karen saw another at Cape May Point SP one day while Cory and I were preparing lunch.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A group of mostly young birds (plus a few adults) stood among the taller *Spartina* grasses on some of the flats edging Jarvis Sound (seen from our back bay boat) and others huddled among juniper branches at the Wetlands Institute.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – More common than the previous species this trip, with a dozen or so balanced on poles near the Wetlands Institute and others around the fringes of Jarvis Sound. At least some of the birds we saw were white-cheeked adults.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*) – Regular around the county, particularly towards its southern end.

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Scudding overhead just about everywhere we looked. This species migrates through Cape May in pretty good numbers.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Also regular, including some hunting over Bunker Pond each day, and one in a dogfight with a young Bald Eagle over Cox Hall Creek WMA. Many of the birds we saw were carrying fish.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – A youngster sailed past as we birded Shell Bay, and others quartered the cattails beyond Bunker Pond on several days.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – Every day but the first afternoon, particularly over the trees edging the fields at Higbee's. We had plenty of practice picking out the "man falling off a cliff" wing flap, and noting the squarer tail, smaller head and crooked leading edge to the wing.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Even more common than the previous species, with dozens circling over the Cape May Point parking lot on some days. It was great to have the two species together in the same kettles, which allowed easy comparison.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Seen on most days, with a wide variety of ages and plumages represented. The one sitting on a post on Nummy Island, the thug chasing the Osprey at Cox Hall Creek, and the one soaring just over our heads at CMBO's Northwood Center were particularly memorable.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*) – One soared over our heads, in the same kettle as a number of other species, as we birded Shell Bay. The buffy "commas" near its wingtips helped to distinguish it from the nearby Broad-winged Hawks.

BROAD-WINGED HAWK (*Buteo platypterus*) – A trio of youngsters circled over Shell Bay, and a few others did the same over Higbee's the following day. This species migrates through Cape May in numbers which depend greatly on prevailing wind directions. Adults tend to stick to the ridges far west of southern New Jersey; it's generally only the hapless youngsters who end up having to cross the bay.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Small numbers on scattered days, including a few perched along highways and byways as we drove around the county. The bulk of this species migrates later in the autumn.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

CLAPPER RAIL (ATLANTIC COAST) (*Rallus crepitans crepitans*) – We tried, and we tried, and we TRIED, on three different days -- and persistence finally paid off, with super studies of a couple of birds at Two Mile Landing. First they called, then they gradually worked their way towards us through the *Spartina* grass, eventually peeking from the edges of the vegetation. And one even swam across the channel!

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus*) – A few sprinkled along the Cape May beach, with others at Sunset Beach and (quite distantly) Anglesea, but our best views came on our back bay boat trip, when we found dozens resting on one of Cape May harbor's rocky jetties.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – A small group flew past -- part of a big mixed flock of shorebirds fleeing some unknown threat - showing their distinctive black "armpits". We saw others on sprinkled around shallow ponds there, and still more on the muddy banks of Jarvis Sounds, seen on our back bay boat trip.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – One shared a muddy strip of saltmarsh with a Greater Yellowlegs in Jarvis Sound, and others nestled among the rocks of a jetty at Stone Harbor Point.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*) – Two snoozed among a big group of Willets at the Wetlands Institute. This is an uncommon, but regular, winter visitor to Cape May.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – Dozens rested on the wooden pilings around one of the marinas in the Cape May harbor, allowing incredibly close approach by our back bay boat.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Hundreds trotted up and down beaches all across the county, chasing (and then fleeing from) the waves. This is probably the most common overwintering shorebird in the county.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – Though this one might be a close second! We saw smaller numbers of this darker-backed species on the beaches of Stone Harbor Point, with others on the shallow pans in the saltmarshes of Jarvis Sound and the Wetlands Institute. These numbers will increase later in the fall.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER (*Calidris fuscicollis*) – Cory spotted one foraging on Nummy Island; it was nice and close, allowing good study of the salient ID features.

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*) – A normally common species in surprisingly short supply this trip, though we did see some on our back bay boat trip.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – Surprisingly scarce this year, no thanks to the high water levels in various "regular" stopover spots. We did catch up with a few dozen sleeping or foraging along the muddy channel shores and shallow saltmarsh puddles on our back bay boat trip.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Some great spotting by Cory netted us fine scope studies of a couple of birds working along the back edge of a big puddle at the Rae Farm.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*) – One, appropriately alone, stalked the puddle at the Rea Farm one morning -- though it was joined by two others later in the week.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Dozens snoozed among the Willets on little islets in the marshy puddle near the Wetlands Institute parking lot, and a handful of others foraged or rested along the edges of Jarvis Sound.

WILLET (WESTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*) – Scores slept or preened in the marshy puddle near the Wetlands Institute parking lot, and we saw a number of others on our back bay boat trip. All of the birds we saw were the paler, longer-legged, western subspecies "inornata" rather than the locally breeding, eastern subspecies "semipalmata".

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – A couple strode around the puddle at the Rea Farm, allowing nice comparison with the nearby Solitary Sandpipers.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – Several hunted "The Rips" -- an area of turbulent current where the waters of the Delaware Bay meet the Atlantic Ocean -- while we watched from the beach near St. Mary's. With practice and patience, we all (I think!) eventually picked them out as they chased some hapless terns around.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – By far the most common gull of the county, with hundreds seen every day of the tour. The largest Laughing Gull breeding colony in the world stretches up the back bays of Cape May county -- more than 30,000 pairs!

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – The first few of these winter visitors mingled with the other gulls in various beach roosts, including a couple just across the street from our hotel on the tour's first afternoon.

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – Another common species in Cape May, with all ages and plumages well represented.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – We had a single adult on the beach across the street from our hotel the first afternoon, with others near the big Black Skimmer flock closer to the convention center later in the week, and a small number of them resting on the sand at Stone Harbor Point. This Eurasian species has been turning up with increasing frequency in North America over the past few decades.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*) – Abundant throughout, including scores resting on various beaches around Cape May and Stone Harbor. This is the largest species of gull in the world.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – And this is the largest tern! We saw a number well during the tour, including some hunting over Bunker Pond (including adults with noisy begging youngsters in tow) and others off the Cape May Beach and at Stone Harbor. That huge red beak is diagnostic.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – Regular through the week, with particularly nice views of some sitting on the sand of the Cape May beach, conveniently close to the very similar Forster's Terns. The dark carpal bar on this species is a good ID mark.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – Abundant throughout, including dozens hunting over the marshes at Two Mile Landing, and plenty of others resting on the sand across the street from our hotel. The black eye patches this species sports in nonbreeding plumage are diagnostic.

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*) – Seen daily, including good numbers resting on the sand among the snoozing Black Skimmers, and others flying past with begging, yellow-billed youngsters in tow.

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – Hundreds and hundreds and HUNDREDS rested on the sands of the Cape May beachfront, shifting nervously at the approach of oblivious people (and some who intentionally flushed them) and occasionally flying off to some other part of the beach.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Common, particularly in town -- and on the old stone bunker near the hawkwatch. [H]

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaidura macroura*) – Abundant throughout, generally perched on a roadside utility wire or trundling around some grassy lawn.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus americanus*) – One sitting quietly among the leaves of a tree beside the first field at Higbee's was a nice surprise one morning. Most cuckoos are gone by the time of our tours.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*) – At least three jostled around Michael and Louise's feeders, though one finally abandoned the fight and fed among the flowers right beside the road instead.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Singles on scattered days -- and a pair along the edge of the channel as we started our boat trip. This species is a scarce breeder in the county, primarily because of a lack of sand cliffs to build their nests in.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – Regular in small numbers, including a few bounding over Higbee's, one perched up at the Rea Farm, and others at Cox Hall Creek.

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – A youngster flew over our heads and landed in a nearby tree one morning at Higbee's, hitching its way upwards for a few yards before bounding off northwards again.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – Seen on most days, including one with the mixed flock across the street from CMBO's Northwood Center, and at least one most mornings at Higbee's.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Our first bounded over the parking lot at Higbee's during our first morning's breakfast. Fortunately, we had others there on later days, including some that perched where we could actually see them!

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – Regular throughout, flapping past overhead just about everywhere we went. This was by far the most common woodpecker of the trip; heck, there were times when we had 6 or 7 in the same tree!

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Seen most days, including a bunch of them hunting from signs and posts at the Cape May County Airport, and others at Higbee's and over the hawkwatch at Cape May Point SP. This species has been in serious decline over the past two decades, and has virtually disappeared as a breeding species in the county.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – Common, and seen well most days, typically rocketing past overhead. We had especially nice views of some circling over the Cape May Point SP parking lot, and others in the sky over the Northwood Center.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – Wow! From our first afternoon, when we had a family group of four playing tag over the beach across from our hotel, to our last morning, when we had at least one hunting overhead as we searched for the Golden-winged Warbler, we had dozens and dozens. Considering it was totally extirpated east of the Rockies only a few decades ago, this species has made a spectacular recovery.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus virens*) – We had one hunting along the edge of a field at Higbee's one morning, just above a big mixed group of sparrows.

LEAST FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax minimus*) – One at Higbee's, hunting low along the edge of one of the fields, took a bit of study to identify. Though it never vocalized, we identified by structure (big headed) and plumage (brownish-backed and white-throated, with a sizable eye ring).

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – Regular at Higbee's (typically hunting from the trees and bushes around the field edges) with others at Cox Hall Creek WMA. This is usually the last migrant flycatcher to arrive in any numbers in Cape May.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*) – Karen and I spotted one at Higbee's one morning, and the whole gang got nice views of a "brown-eyed" White-eyed Vireo (aka a youngster) flicking through some dense shrubs along the edge of a field at Higbee's.

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*) – One with a mixed flock near the Cape May County Airport was a surprise; it's late for this species by the time of our tours. It flicked through pines just over a chainlink fence along the road, giving us great views -- eventually!

PHILADELPHIA VIREO (*Vireo philadelphicus*) – A couple of birds along a field edge at Higbee's were a nice late-season find one morning.

RED-EYED VIREO (*Vireo olivaceus*) – This is the only vireo expected in any numbers late in the season at Cape May -- and it was certainly the most common of the vireos we saw on the tour. Those along the road in front of CMBO's Northwood Center gave us especially good looks.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Common and widespread throughout, particularly at Higbee's, where we saw plenty flying over the open fields -- including a few carrying acorns.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Regular, particularly around Higbee's, where we heard and saw their cawing gangs each morning.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Less common than the previous species, though more regular along the coast. We first heard their distinctive nasal calls at the Cape May County Airport.

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – A handful sat on signs or trundled around in the short grass along the runways at the Cape May County Airport. A few were drabber youngsters, but most seemed to be adults.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Thousands and thousands and THOUSANDS, in big swirling flocks, particularly along the coast.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – A single bird among the masses of Tree Swallows over Bunker Pond at Cape May Point SP one morning.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Our first were a little gang that swirled through the juniper trees around our picnic lunch spot in Cape May Point SP; they were the first of many! We had lots of them with mixed flocks through the forested bits of the county.

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – Best seen at Higbee's where a calling birds just couldn't resist when we whistled back to them. They approached to within yards, ready to drive the intruders out.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – Single birds on several days, including one hitching its way up a pine trunk near the parking lot at Cox Hall Creek WMA. This is an irruptive migrant to Cape May; some years, it's hard to find, while other years, it's everywhere. This was a lower number year.

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – A pair at Cox Hall Creek, one of the strongholds for the species in the county.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*) – All of us heard -- and a few of the group spotted -- one at Cape May Point SP one day. Fortunately, we had better luck with one in the back garden at the Northwood Center, seen hitching up a tree trunk while we searched for the Golden-winged Warbler.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – Common around Cape May, though far more likely to be heard than seen. We caught up with a few pairs at Higbee's, and others around the Northwood Center.

Poliptilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliptila caerulea*) – A single bird twitched through the bushes across the road from CMBO's Northwood Center, its long tail switching, part of a big mixed group of small passerines.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – Scattered birds, including a trio in a conifer in the garden of the house next to the Northwood Center. This species typically arrives later in the season than does the next one -- and tends to hang around conifers once it arrives.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – Small numbers flitted in the trees around the Northwood Center. The constant wing-flicking of this small species is distinctive -- and a good behavioral field mark.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – A handful with the big mixed flock at the Cape May County Airport showed nicely as they foraged among the pines. This species tends to flock up for the winter.

SWAINSON'S THRUSH (*Catharus ustulatus*) – A handful at Higbee's one morning showed very nicely as they gobbled fruits -- though they flicked into and out of view for a bit before they finally popped out into the open.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Dozens in flight over Higbee's on several mornings, with others

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Very common at Higbee's, where they clambered around in the trees, gobbling fruits from various vines and trees.

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*) – Another regular at Higbee's, though in smaller numbers -- and more retiring -- than the previous species.

We got nice looks at several chucking from fruiting trees as they climbed steadily higher.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Widespread, including a pair hanging around the parking lot of Cape May Point SP, and one at our hotel.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Plenty, just about everywhere we went. [I]

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – We saw small, tight flocks over Higbee's on most mornings, with scope views of one group (of mostly youngsters) atop a tree near the parking lot there.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) – The report of this species, which is normally long gone by the time of our tours, led to quite the "twitch"! We spent a fair bit of time tracking the wary young male from one dense bit of bushes to another, as it followed a bunch of chickadees around. I think most got a reasonably good look at it by the end, particularly when it danced along a telephone wire -- sorry Jeff!

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – One of the more common warblers of the week, with a few crawling up trunks and branches at Higbee's and the CMBO's Northwood Center.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – One feeding low in the weeds along one of the tracks at Higbee's was an exciting find one morning. It disappeared shortly after we first laid eyes on it, but -- fortunately -- with some patience, we were able to relocate it.

NASHVILLE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*) – Numbers hunted from the sorghum heads in one of the fields -- or from the neighboring sumac bushes -- at Higbee's one morning. By the next day, they were gone!

MOURNING WARBLER (*Geothlypis philadelphia*) – This one was a pain in the backside! We spent several hours over several days traipsing back and forth along a vegetated island in the sorghum field, trying to lay eyes on this beast -- and it FINALLY flew across the track in front of us and flitted along some open branches before vanishing back into the vegetation.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – The most common of the tour's warblers, seen in good numbers on all but our first afternoon, particularly in the fields at Higbee's, where they twitched back and forth across the trails. Most appeared to be youngsters or females, but we did connect with a few adult males.

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Another species that proved pretty common throughout the week, both at Higbee's and around the CMBO's Northwood Center. Most were "yellowstarts", but we did find at least one adult male.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – Another fairly common species during the week, with small groups of them flicking through the lakeside trees across from CMBO's Northwood Center, and others at Higbee's and Cox Hall Creek WMA. This is a handsome little warbler!

MAGNOLIA WARBLER (*Setophaga magnolia*) – A few of the group got a look at one flicking through the trees at Higbee's one morning. Its half-black (tip), half-white (base) tail pattern is diagnostic.

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – A few of these golden-backed warblers flitted through the trees outside the Northwood Center on several days. This species generally migrates well offshore, but a few get blown to shore on persistent east winds, like we had much of the week.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – A khaki-colored female hunted low in the bushes along Lake Lily's lakefront, and a male did the same a few days later.

PALM WARBLER (*Setophaga palmarum*) – Quite common in the fields at Higbee's, where they flitted from the trees into the weedy fields and back, or hunted from taller sprigs. That constantly dipping tail is a great behavioral field mark.

PINE WARBLER (*Setophaga pinus*) – A bright male with a mixed flock at the Cape May County Airport was a nice surprise. It foraged through a pine (appropriately), moving between sunlight and shadow.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (*Setophaga coronata*) – This, typically the last warbler species to arrive in significant numbers in the fall, had definitely started to filter in by the time of this tour. We had increasing numbers as the week went on -- particularly in the poplar trees along the shore of Lake Lily. Many will overwinter in Cape May.

PRAIRIE WARBLER (*Setophaga discolor*) – One at Higbee's one morning, in the same area where we found our Orange-crowned Warbler. The distinctive face pattern of this handsome species is visible year-round, even in nonbreeding plumage, as are the bold flank streaks on its yellow underparts.

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*) – One flicked through some of the taller trees edging one of the fields at Higbee's one morning, mingling with a few Northern Parulas.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – A female at Higbee's on our first morning was, unfortunately, only seen by a few. This is a fairly uncommon species in Cape May.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

NELSON'S SPARROW (*Ammodramus nelsoni*) – This was the second of the former "Sharp-tailed Sparrows" we found on Nummy Island -- the one whose orangish breast band was finely streaked with black. We got nice views, though briefer than our looks at the next species.

SALTMARSH SPARROW (*Ammodramus caudacutus*) – And this was first of the two "Sharp-tailed Sparrows" we saw -- a pair, hopping along through the short vegetation on Nummy Island. Their chests lack the orange color of the previous species, and they're more heavily streaked.

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – This was our first "salty sparrow", seen slipping through the *Spartina* grass at Shell Bay. Eventually, it sat right out in the open, giving us great scope views.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – Our first were a couple sitting in the early morning sunshine at Higbee's one morning. But our best views came at the Cape May County Airport, where a big flock of them swirled through pines and oaks, or scratched among the fallen leaves.

FIELD SPARROW (*Spizella pusilla*) – Two sat blinking in the morning sunshine, perched on bare branches right at the edge of the island of trees in one of the fields at Higbee's. Their small size and plain faces (only a big white eye ring) help to quickly identify them.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – This winter visitor had definitely arrived! We saw big numbers of them on several days at Higbee's, rummaging along the edges of the fields and scratching under the trees -- and heard even more, as they called softly to each other.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Our best views came at The Meadows, where several bounced along the paths in front of us. We saw others at Sunset Beach and on our boat trip.

- SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*) – Smaller numbers among the mixed sparrow flocks we found at Higbee's. Their long tails and heavily streaked breasts helped to quickly separate them from their flock mates.
- SWAMP SPARROW** (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Increasing numbers in the fields at Higbee's as the week went by. These lovely rusty-backed sparrows are a common migrant through Cape May.
- EASTERN TOWHEE** (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) – We heard one calling from the vegetation around the Wetlands Institute, but never located it; this was undoubtedly a migrant, as the habitat sure isn't right there for towhees! [✱]

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

- SCARLET TANAGER** (*Piranga olivacea*) – A couple of males sat tucked in among the grape vines and juniper branches of a tree in one of the wooded strips edging a field at Higbee's. They looked tired!
- NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Commonplace, with many seen at Higbee's and others around Cape May Point. Some of the youngsters looked pretty scruffy with molt.
- ROSE-BREADED GROSBEAK** (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – A female (or young male) chirruped from the top of a nearly leafless tree at Higbee's, sounding a bit like a sneaker squeaking on the gym floor.
- BLUE GROSBEAK** (*Passerina caerulea*) – A female clung, nibbling, to one of the sorghum heads at Higbee's, giving us a chance to put her in the scopes -- when she wasn't ducking down behind closer plants, that is!
- INDIGO BUNTING** (*Passerina cyanea*) – Quite common in the fields at Higbee's, where they were feeding on various seeds. The males were largely without their blue tones, though a few showed brighter wings or tails.
- DICKCISSEL** (*Spiza americana*) – One with the buntings in the sorghum field at Higbee's was a nice find as we searched for the Mourning Warbler. It eventually flew up into the little island of trees in the middle of the field, which let us study it with the scopes.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

- BOBOLINK** (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – Most of the birds we saw were little more than bounding dots heading over as their distinctive "link" calls rained down, but one perched in the taller grasses along the edge of the road at Nummy Island was amazingly close.
- RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – This was one of the more common diurnal migrants, seen in good numbers most days -- always heading south. We had birds on the ground on our back bay boat trip, sprinkled among the *Spartina* grass and scattered bushes in the marshes.
- COMMON GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – This species can be surprisingly hard to find in Cape May in the autumn. We saw a handful (mostly flying over) at Cox Hall Creek, and a few over Higbee's, but they were nowhere numerous.
- BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus major*) – Common along the coast, with a good-sized group foraging on one of the grassy flats on Nummy Island, and a couple of glossy, long-tailed males singing from telephone wires at Two Mile Landing.
- BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*) – A gang in a puddle and scattered across the surrounding lawn at the Cape May County Airport generated little enthusiasm among the watchers.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

- HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Small numbers on most days, including a female perched on a telephone wire at Miami Beach, and a male singing from in a tree in the parking lot of the Wetlands Institute. This species has been hammered locally by conjunctivitis, and is much less common than it was two decades ago. [I]
- AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus tristis*) – Daily, often in sizable numbers. We got particularly nice looks at flocks of them feeding on hackberry fruits at Higbee's -- all wearing their duller nonbreeding plumage.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

- HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Particularly common around our hotel. Those of us waiting at the Philadelphia Airport on our first afternoon were entertained by a little group of them that had gotten into the building and were cadging around after scraps. [II]

MAMMALS

- EASTERN COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – Seen on most days, typically scurrying across the road in front of the van.
- EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Another common resident, particularly at Higbee's.
- BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN** (*Tursiops truncatus*) – The Delaware Bay (and surrounding coastal areas) is a big staging area for this species on their journey south, and numbers can build up into the hundreds before they leave. We saw several pods hunting just offshore at St. Mary's and Sunset Beach.
- WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Two along the side of the road on our drive down from the airport were the only ones we spotted on the tour.

Herps

- ROUGH GREEN SNAKE** (*Opheodrys aestivus*) – This was the slim, little green snake we found beside the track at Cox Hall Creek WMA.
- RED-EARED SLIDER** (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) – A few basked around Lake Lily, catching the late morning sunshine. This species is not native to New Jersey; it has been introduced (i.e. released by pet owners who no longer want them) from points further south. [II]
- EASTERN BOX TURTLE** (*Terrapene carolina*) – We found a tiny, silver dollar sized youngster crawling along one of the paths at Higbee's one morning. It took one look at us and quickly folded itself away inside its shell.
- NORTHERN RED-BELLIED TURTLE** (*Pseudemys rubriventris*) – A few of these larger turtles lounged around the edges of Lake Lily. Their red, rather than yellow, plastrons (bellies), and the yellow, rather than red, facial stripes help to separate them from the introduced Red-eared Slider.
- SOUTHERN GRAY TREEFROG** (*Hyla chrysoscelis*) – We heard the distinctive churring of this species at Higbee's and Cox Hall Creek WMA, and spotted a trio of them lurking in a crack in a dead tree at Cox Hall Creek.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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