



Field Guides Tour Report

Cape May Megan's Way I 2017

Sep 23, 2017 to Sep 29, 2017

Megan Edwards Crewe

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



We found big flocks of "Western" Willets on each of our visits to the Wetlands Institute. Photo by participant Paula Connelly.

Cape May's long peninsula is justly famous for its autumn migration. For months, on northwest winds, birds stream south along its watery flanks, headed for their wintering grounds. And our tour is timed to hit the peak of that river of migration. While we had to contend with days of strong winds that stubbornly blew from the wrong direction, we got a taste or two of the "big days" that are possible here -- and had plenty of birds to enjoy during our week.

On our very first morning, we found "The Corner" at Higbee's -- a break in a hedgerow where a steady stream of warblers, kinglets, finches, vireos and more worked past, pausing briefly in front of us before jumping the gap. On some mornings, the skies were full of bounding Northern Flickers, their golden underwings flashing in the sun. On others, the dunes twitched with tail-wagging Palm Warblers. Hundreds of Tree Swallows made swirling bird tornadoes that formed and broke apart and formed again. Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks shared airspace, allowing convenient comparisons. A mob of Laughing Gulls and Forster's Terns quartered the choppy rips off Cape May Point, with a handful of thuggish Parasitic Jaegers occasionally launching flashing pursuits. Sanderlings and Dunlin, Western Sandpipers and Semipalmated Plovers pattered along the sandy beach at Stone Harbor -- for as far as we could see in both directions. And who will soon forget that river of American Kestrels (with the occasional Merlin thrown in for variety) that streamed past the hawkwatch one fine afternoon?!

But it wasn't just the bigger numbers that were memorable. A Clapper Rail rewarded our patience by creeping along a muddy bank and splashing for several minutes in a nearby channel. A gorgeous male Black-throated Blue Warbler flitted through nearby weed stems, allowing us to ogle him from mere feet away. Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned night-herons awoke from their snoozes in a wet wood to keep wary red eyes on us. A trio of Cape May Warblers investigated leafy treetops along a quiet path at Cape May Point State Park, and a Chestnut-sided Warbler paraded back and forth through a tree at Higbee's, its tail cocked up jauntily.

Thanks for joining me in my former "backyard"; it was fun to share the excitement of migration birding with you. And the evenings spent wining and dining at various Cape May establishments were enjoyable too. I hope to see you all again in the field somewhere, some day!

-- 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)

- SNOW GOOSE** (*Chen caerulescens*) – A couple of injured birds (trailing broken wings) trundled along the edge of one of the lagoons at Forsythe NWR. Clearly it's a good spot to be an injured bird, since they must have survived there since last winter!
- CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Common and widespread, seen every day of the tour -- including a line of them migrating past on our last morning at Higbee's.
- MUTE SWAN** (*Cygnus olor*) – Another common and widespread species -- too common, considering they're an introduced (and invasive) addition to the south Jersey avifauna. [I]
- WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) – A gang of them floated on one of the ponds at Forsythe, shadowing the feeding swans. This species often kleptoparasitizes their larger cousins, stealing mouthfuls of whatever the swans dredge up from the bottom of the lagoon.
- GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*) – A small group -- a drake and a handful of hens -- paddled around in one of the ponds at the Meadows; eventually, the drake climbed out onto an island for a preen and a bit of a snooze. We saw others at Forsythe NWR.
- AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*) – A female floated among the Mallards at the Meadows, distinguished, in part, by her short blue-gray bill.
- AMERICAN BLACK DUCK** (*Anas rubripes*) – We spotted a few in the big mixed duck flock at the Meadows, where their darker color made them relatively easy to pick out from the female Mallards. They really came into their own at Forsythe; the refuge was originally established to preserve that species, and -- judging by the number we saw floating on the ponds there -- they seem to be doing well.
- MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – The most common of tour's ducks, seen on most days -- including a few on Bunker Pond (out in front of the hawkwatch platform) most days and a huge, babbling mob in a pond in a front yard on Shunpike Road.
- BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas discors*) – A few females (or youngsters), conveniently mixed with some Green-winged Teal for nice comparison at the Meadows; this species has dark undertail coverts and a pale spot at the base of the bill. We saw dozens of others -- including a male starting to show traces of his crescent-shaped facial mark -- at Forsythe.
- NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*) – Some of the group spotted a few swimming on Bunker Pond while I prepared breakfast one morning at Cape May Point State Park (CMPSP), and we found others among the Northern Pintails at Forsythe.
- NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*) – Dozens floated on the ponds at Forsythe, looking lean and pale among the other ducks. None were yet in their striking breeding plumage.
- GREEN-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas crecca*) – Dozens on the east pond at the Meadows, where they looked tiny in comparison with most of the other ducks. Their small size and unstreaked undertail -- plus the thin butterscotch-colored patch just under their tails -- helps to separate them from the similar Blue-winged Teal.
- BLACK SCOTER** (*Melanitta americana*) – We spotted a couple of males -- sporting their distinctive orange-knobbed bills -- and a single female floating in the sea just beyond the jetties on various beaches at Cape May Point. This species overwinters by the thousands around Cape May.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

- NORTHERN BOBWHITE** (*Colinus virginianus*) – A male scurried past as we ate our breakfast at CMPSP one morning. This species, once common in south Jersey, was reintroduced to the Coast Guard base a few years ago in an effort to control ticks. They have spread well beyond the base since then.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

- WILD TURKEY** (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – A group of eight or so weaved along the edge of Seagrove Avenue one morning, picking at the grasses as they strolled along. This species has expanded significantly in south Jersey.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

- PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – A single bird floated with a little group of preening Mallards on Bunker Pond, and more than a dozen others did the same on ponds all across Forsythe NWR.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

- DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Common and widespread, including some fishing in the surf off Cape May's beaches, some resting on posts and walls around Cape May harbor's marinas, and some standing spread-eagled on dead snags at Forsythe.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

- GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) – Seen most days in small numbers, including a couple flying in off the sea one morning, and dozens standing hunched along the edges of the reeds at Forsythe.
- GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*) – Another regular sighting, particularly at Two Mile Landing, Nummy Island and Forsythe, where dozens foraged and preened close to the next species for easy comparison.
- SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*) – Very common throughout, in just about every sizable body of water we passed.
- LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulea*) – A trio of adults hunted near the shallow puddle where the Willets rested at the Wetlands Institute, appearing and disappearing as they patrolled the channels. We saw a few other adults on Nummy Island later in the week.
- TRICOLORED HERON** (*Egretta tricolor*) – A few stalked channels near the Wetlands Institute, some rested on the back bay islands seen during our boat trip, and others hunted on Nummy Island. Most Tricolored Herons have already left New Jersey by the time of our tours.
- GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*) – One leaped out of the reeds along the edge of the east path in the Meadows, and fled across the water to the banks of one of the small islands.
- BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Our best looks came at the roost in Avalon, where we found birds of all ages, in nice comparison with the next species. We saw others from the Osprey, a few standing like statues on posts near the Wetlands Institute, and hiding in the bushes at Forsythe.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – A trio -- one hunting youngster, a resting one-year-old, and a post-sitting adult -- entertained us at the Wetlands Institute on one visit, and we had nice, close views of others at the Avalon roost.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – A group of four flew past, followed shortly by another, while we birded along the windy wildlife drive at Forsythe -- nice spotting, Michael!

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*) – Daily, in much smaller numbers than the next species. This one is smaller, shorter-tailed, and shorter-winged.

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Ubiquitous, including some big kettles bubbling over Cape May Point -- and getting higher and higher and higher -- on most days of the tour.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Daily, with multiple birds in the sky together on multiple occasions -- including a trio circling over one of the ponds at CMPSP one morning, and a successful hunter carrying a big fish inland from the coast one afternoon.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Small numbers danced over the waving reeds at Forsythe, fighting the wind as they wobbled across the marshes. Heidi spotted our first from the Gull Pond tower, shortly after we arrived.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – This species, normally one of Cape May's commonest raptors, was surprisingly scarce this year. We saw a few flap-flap-gliding their way along the hedgerows at Higbee's on our first morning, and spotted others in a big mixed flock circling over CMPSP the next day.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Seen more often than the previous species, as usual, but in far smaller numbers than expected. Our best views came one lunchtime at CMPSP, when low-flying birds circled over the parking lot as we stopped for lunch; we also watched a big female move from fence post to fence post along the beach front in Cape May.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Seen on most days of the tour, with particularly nice views of an adult soaring over CMPSP as we settled in for lunch one day. Another adult powered past over the impoundments at Forsythe scattering ducks, geese and gulls in its wake.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*) – A single soaring bird was seen on our way down from the Philadelphia airport, picked out thanks to the distinctive pale crescent near its wingtips. Unfortunately, I think only Michael and I could see it, as it was flying straight above the van over the highway -- which made spotting it from the back rows a bit problematic!

BROAD-WINGED HAWK (*Buteo platypterus*) – Three or four high flyers circled with a big mixed raptor flock over the Coral Avenue dune crossover in Cape May Point late one morning -- clearly unhappy with the prospect of crossing the bay.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Several soared over the highway on our drive down from the Philadelphia airport, others circled with a mixed raptor flock over the Coral Avenue dune crossover, and we saw another perched in some dead trees near the Cape May harbor on our boat trip.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

CLAPPER RAIL (ATLANTIC COAST) (*Rallus crepitans crepitans*) – This was definitely a good example of persistence paying off. When we first arrived at Two Mile Landing, we didn't see or hear a thing except the wind and a few egrets. But with some patience, and a bit of help from my iPhone, we eventually found a responsive bird -- and in the end, it walked right out to the edge of the channel and took a bath!

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus*) – Dozens of these handsome shorebirds rested along the Cape May Harbor's south jetty, allowing very close approach by our boat. We saw scores of others more distantly from North Wildwood, while trying to find the Marbled Godwits.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Regular in small numbers most days of the trip; they were all already in their drabber winter plumage -- rather belying the "black-bellied" in their name! We saw them especially well in the shallow pans on Nummy Island.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – A handful trotted around on the beach at Stone Harbor, looking rotund among the slimmer peeps, and others did the same in the big shorebird flock at Forsythe.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – A trio of widely-spaced, calling birds flew past us as we birded along the beach at CMPSP one morning. This is the only plover that regularly breeds in Cape May county.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus*) – A couple of birds feeding in *Spartina* grass along the edge of Jarvis Sound, seen from our back bay boat, were a bit of a surprise; most Whimbrels are already further south by the time of our tours.

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*) – Unfortunately, we never got a really good look at these winter visitors. We found a group of four among a mob of American Oystercatchers at the tip of Stone Harbor Point, but they were at least a half mile from where we stood in North Wildwood -- which meant they were little more than wavering, long-legged, cinnamon-orange blobs!

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – A handful on the stone jetties at Stone Harbor, a few others on the jetties protruding from Cape May's beaches, and still more lounging on the marina walls around the Cape May harbor, seen on our back bay boat trip.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Dozens. Scores. Hundreds! These pale shorebirds pattered along the sand at the very edge of the sea, scurrying away from each advancing wave, then chasing the water back down the beach as it receded. This is a very common winter visitor in Cape May.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – A few of these darker, longer-billed shorebirds scurried among the Sanderlings at Stone Harbor and others mingled with the peeps at Forsythe. This is another common winter visitor in Cape May.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – A trio of these small, pale-legged shorebirds rested on the muddy edge of a saltmarsh pan, seen on our boat trip. Conveniently, they were right in front of a trio of Semipalmated Sandpipers, allowing nice comparison.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER (*Calidris fuscicollis*) – At least one (and probably more) mingled with a mob of Semipalmated Sandpipers and Dunlin at Forsythe. I THINK everybody got a scope view before that Peregrine went by...

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – A single bird towered (relatively speaking) over the other shorebirds in a mixed flock at Forsythe.

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*) – A flock of several hundred foraged busily on the muddy edge of one of the impoundments at Forsythe -- until a passing Peregrine stirred everything up. We saw others at Stone Harbor (where they were far outnumbered by the next species)

and on our back bay boat trip.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – Dozens and dozens rummaged along the shore at Stone Harbor, further up the beach than the larger Dunlin and Sanderlings.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – A few mingled with the Willets at the Wetlands Institute one afternoon, and others loafed around the edges of some of the pans on Nummy Island.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – A trio bobbed along the edge of a channel at Forsythe, occasionally breaking into stiff-winged flight.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*) – A single bird foraged actively along the edge of the front-yard pond we visited on Shunpike Road. It was intently focused on the task at hand, completely ignoring the noisy mob of surrounding Mallards.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Good numbers mixed with the Willets at the Wetlands Institute, and others hunted in the channels and impoundments at Forsythe.

WILLET (EASTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata semipalmata*) – A single bird hunted on one of the saltmarsh pans in Jarvis Sound. This is the local breeding subspecies, which is generally gone by the time of our tours.

WILLET (WESTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*) – Dozens and dozens snoozed on the saltmarsh pans at the Wetlands Institute. This visiting subspecies (which arrives after breeding in America's west) has longer tarsi and a plainer back than eastern birds do.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – A group of five calling birds flew over our heads as we stood at "The Corner" at Higbee's on our last morning.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – Several birds among the big gull and tern flock in the rips off Cape May Point put on quite a show, surging after hapless terns in twisting pirouettes, chasing them until they dropped their fish.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Common and ubiquitous, seen in good numbers on every day of the tour. This is the most common gull species in Cape May during the summer. The county's breeding colony numbers more than 30,000 pairs -- making it the largest known Laughing Gull colony!

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – A few scattered along area beaches were the vanguard of birds soon to arrive; this species breeds to the north, but overwinters in big numbers around Cape May.

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – Regular on the beaches of Cape May county, though generally in smaller numbers than the next species. Adults were easy to separate, and with a little practice, most could identify the grubby "rolled in the dust" youngsters as well.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*) – Very common and widespread, including some big flocks loafing on various beaches. This is the world's largest gull.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – And this is the world's largest tern! We saw small numbers of them on most days, including a few hunting along the surf line on the Cape May and Stone Harbor beaches, and a big group sprinkled among the Royal Terns on the beach just north of the Cape May Harbor north jetty, seen on our boat trip.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – A double handful of birds -- mostly hatch-year youngsters -- rested on the sandy Cape May beach among the far more common Forster's Terns one afternoon, and we saw another among a big group of Forster's Terns at Forsythe. An obvious dark carpal bar is a very handy field mark for young Common Terns.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – Another very common species, widespread throughout across the coastal regions of the county. Their frosty-white upperwings quickly separate them from the previous species, and in their non-breeding plumage, their black eye patches are diagnostic.

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*) – Regular along the county's coasts, with especially nice views of some towering over the Forster's Terns on the beach at Cape May. This species doesn't breed in New Jersey, but arrives in big numbers once the breeding season (further south) is over.

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – Hundreds rested on the beach at Cape May, occasionally rising in barking flocks to circle, in graceful unison, over the sand. Our best looks probably came right across the street from our hotel, when we found a single bird standing near the changing huts at the top of the beach.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Common, particularly around Cape May, where a big multi-colored flock swept back and forth along the sea front, regularly settling onto the roofs of several nearby hotels. [I]

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaidura macroura*) – Regular, scattered on telephone wires, or rising on whistling wings from grassy areas throughout.

Apodidae (Swifts)

CHIMNEY SWIFT (*Chaetura pelagica*) – Two zipped past as we birded from the hawkwatch one afternoon, providing a counterpoint to all those American Kestrels.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*) – Our first investigated some flowers along the edge of the path at the Meadows, then shot off across the reserve. We had much better looks at another at Higbee's; it returned again and again to the same thorny branch of a Multiflora Rose bush between feeding bouts at nearby flowers, giving us all the chance to see it in the scope.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Singles on many days, including flying past over the beach at CMPSP, several hunting over Jarvis Sound and the Cape May harbor on our boat trip, and several scattered on posts and dead trees around the wildlife loop at Forsythe.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – Our first was a noisy bird foraging in a pine grove near the Cape May County Airport. We spotted another at Cox Hall Creek WMA (one of the few birds we actually found there!) and saw others bounding past over the fields at Higbee's. The big white circles in the center of their outstretched wings is a good field mark for this species.

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – A youngster in a tree over Lighthouse Drive -- looking decidedly like a bit of tree bark -- was a highlight of a quiet afternoon's walk near Lake Lily.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – Seen on several days, with particularly nice views of one hammering away on a tree at Higbee's, one of the many species we saw at "our corner" that first morning. We saw others at CMBO's Northwood Center, and at Forsythe.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – One in the same pine grove as our first Red-bellied Woodpecker at the Cape May County Airport proved very cooperative, posing several times on open parts of various tree trunks. We heard the high-pitched calls of another at Higbee's.

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – So what WAS the final count of these for the week? If we'd had a dollar for every one we saw...

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Who will soon forget that river of kestrels streaming past the CMPSP hawkwatch?! We got to see them from virtually every conceivable angle -- including a few so close overhead that we could very nearly touch them.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – The most common of the tour's falcons, seen on every day -- including several rocketing past the CMPSP hawkwatch platform on our big falcon flight day, sometimes interrupting their passage to harass nearby American Kestrels. We saw several hunting dragonflies over the ponds at the Meadows.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – Considering that this species was extirpated from east of the Rockies, their comeback has been nothing short of miraculous. We saw them nearly every day, with especially nice scope studies of one perched on the lee side of the Coast Guard water tower one windy afternoon.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus virens*) – One hunted from dead branches in the pine grove near the Cape May County Airport, returning again and again to the same perches.

ALDER FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax alnorum*) – A single bird along the middle trail at Higbee's (flushed by another birding group on the other side of the hedgerow) was a bit of a surprise; most Alder Flycatchers are long gone by the time of our tours.

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – This is typically among the last of the season's flycatchers in Cape May, and we saw plenty of them, pumping their tails as they hunted from hedgerow trees along the edges of the fields at Higbee's.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*) – One flitted through the low branches of the cherry tree in "our corner" at Higbee's on our last morning, moving back and forth from there into the thicker shrubs behind.

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*) – Heidi was the lucky one who connected with this handsome vireo, high in the same cherry tree as the previous species on our last morning.

RED-EYED VIREO (*Vireo olivaceus*) – By far the most common vireo of the tour, seen well every day but one -- and we probably just didn't look hard enough that day! The birds with the Cape May Warbler flock were particularly obliging as they foraged over our heads.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Regular throughout, particularly in wooded areas. We saw some noisy parties over the hedgerows at Higbee's, and others around the feeders at the bird observatory. This species is one of the major planters of oak trees -- they never eat all of the acorns they cache!

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Regular throughout, particularly in more wooded areas (like Higbee's), where their deep-throated "caws" were a common part of the tour soundtrack.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – As their name suggests, these were common along the coast, and in wetland areas. We had good views of the regular mob along the Cape May beachfront most days (doing their very best lurking -- a la "The Birds" -- on rooftops near our hotel), and repeatedly heard the distinctively nasal "car" of a conversational pair at the Wetlands Institute one afternoon.

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – A single bird sat up on one of the directional signs along the runway at the Cape May County Airport, its "horns" wagging ferociously in the strong winds. Unfortunately, the grass there hadn't been cut in a while, so when the bird dropped down off the sign, it completely disappeared!

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Seen daily, typically in small numbers. On our afternoon at the Meadows, however, we were enveloped by a much bigger flock that swarmed overhead and then descended down to drink in the ponds and feed in the nearby bayberry bushes. We saw other massive flocks over Jarvis Sound during our boat trip.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Common and widespread, recorded daily, with especially nice views of those raiding the feeders at CMBO's Northwood Center. This southern species makes it about halfway up the state of New Jersey; the hybrid zone (between this species and Black-capped Chickadee) is a 60-mile-wide band centering on Newark.

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – Another common species in the county's woodlands and subdivisions, with the inquisitive pair along a trail at Cox Hall Creek WMA showing especially well.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – Two hitched their way up several trees along the edge of the picnic grove at Forsythe, their nasal "yank yank" calls helping us to locate them.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – One shot across the path at Higbee's while we stood at "our corner" on our first morning; it paused briefly on the edge before disappearing into the thick undergrowth.

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – Some of us heard one singing softly to itself near the start of the path along the back side of Bunker Pond as we set out for our walk around CMPSP. Others were a bit further back down the path, enjoying a view of a very showy Common Yellowthroat! [*]

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – Abundant all around Cape May county -- though, as usual, far more were heard than seen. We had some superb views though, including a very obliging pair on the grounds of CMBO's Northwood Center our first afternoon, and other cooperative birds at "our corner" in Higbee's.

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – Multiple birds flitted along the hedgerow at Higbee's our first morning, with several pausing at the edge of the gap long enough for us to get nice views. We saw a couple of others with the Cape May Warblers in a mixed flock along one of the paths at CMPSP.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – Most common at Higbee's on our "flight days", when we saw plenty flicking their wings as they moved along the hedgerows.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – A couple of birds among the big Chipping Sparrow flock at the Cape May County airport. At one point, the male dropped right down onto the road not far away to snatch some tasty morsel off the pavement.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – A conversational flock flashed back and forth between a grassy yard and the surrounding wet woods in Avalon's dune forest, a bonus on our visit to the night-heron roost.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Dozens flitted through berrying bushes all across the county -- particularly along the field edges at Higbee's, where we saw them from just about every conceivable angle.

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*) – Single birds on most days, including one that sat up for scope views at Higbee's one morning. We heard the loud "CHUCK" calls of this species (which sound rather like a smacking kiss on the back of a hand) regularly.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Another common species, heard singing -- and seen perched up on bush tops -- all across the county.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Abundant throughout, including some fairly big flocks along various roadsides. [I]

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Particularly common on our final morning, when several small, tight flocks flew past, calling shrilly.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – Heidi spotted one walking on the ground under the cedar trees near our picnic shelter while birding before breakfast one morning.

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – Small numbers seen on our days in forested areas, including one hitching its way up trunks around the CMBO's Northwood Center and others at Higbee's.

NASHVILLE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*) – One with a little flock of warblers working through the reeds along the edge of Bunker Pond.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – One of the more common warblers of the week, particularly at Higbee's, where they flitted from the weedy fields to the hedgerows. Most were females and youngsters, though we did find at least one full adult male, and a couple of young males starting to show traces of their black masks.

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Another common warbler, though we only found one or two adult males among the plethora of females and youngsters. Their long tails -- and their habitat of regularly flirting those tails -- were distinctive. We had particularly nice looks at many parading through the hedgerow at "our corner" of Higbee's that first morning.

CAPE MAY WARBLER (*Setophaga tigrina*) – A trio -- two males and a female -- flicked through the treetops near one of the pond overlooks at CMPSP, seen on our walk around the loop trail there. As its name suggests, this species was first collected in Cape May.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – Among the week's most common warblers, particularly on our good flight days at Higbee's, with plenty of nice looks at "our corner". These small warblers look particularly short-tailed in flight.

MAGNOLIA WARBLER (*Setophaga magnolia*) – A female investigated branches in trees near "our corner" at Higbee's, and another moved with a small mixed flock near Lake Lily.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – A couple of females perched briefly at the top of one of the Black Walnut trees near "our corner" one morning at Higbee's, and another two flitted through bushes near Bunker Pond, seen as we walked the loop trail. We did spot a male with a mixed group of warblers at CMBO's Northwood Center.

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER (*Setophaga pennsylvanica*) – A young female paraded back and forth through the branches of a big cherry tree at "our corner", giving us long minutes of great views. We found an adult male -- still showing some traces of his fancy breeding plumage -- with the mixed flock over the picnic grove at Forsythe.

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – One of these big warblers, in its subdued golden-brown winter plumage, flitted through the trees out in front of CMBO's Northwood Center. With patience, we even got to see the pale feet at the end of its dark legs -- a diagnostic field mark.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER (*Setophaga caeruleascens*) – Our first male gave only the fleetest of glimpses to only a few of the group. Fortunately, we found a much more cooperative male feeding in one of the weedy fields at Higbee's on our last morning.

PALM WARBLER (*Setophaga palmarum*) – Another species that was among the most common of the week -- particularly in the dunes along the beaches, where we found tail-dipping flocks scurrying around in the sand. We saw plenty of others in the trees at Higbee's.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (*Setophaga coronata*) – Most of us only heard one calling from the trees along the loop path at CMPSP, but Heidi managed to see it before it flew off. We saw a few others flying over at Higbee's our last morning.

PRAIRIE WARBLER (*Setophaga discolor*) – One hunting only feet off the ground in the flower border at the Wetlands Institute let us get very close. Fortunately (for those who weren't with us that afternoon) we found others around Lake Lily and at CPMSP.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

SALTMARSH SPARROW (*Ammodramus caudacutus*) – Michael was the lucky one looking in the right direction when one of these handsome sparrows popped up next to the van at Forsythe.

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – Those who braved the wind at Forsythe saw one of these gray sparrows fly back and forth across a roadside channel a few times, in the same area where we found our Spotted Sandpipers.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – A big, loose flock of these small sparrows worked through a pine grove near the Cape May County Airport, flitting down to the grass to nibble on seeds, then flitting back up into the trees above for a look around. We saw others with a mixed flock over the picnic grove at Forsythe.

FIELD SPARROW (*Spizella pusilla*) – A family group worked along the edge of CMPSP's Bunker Pond one morning, with a few of the birds sitting up in the open while others flicked through the denser grasses and bushes below them. The small size, blank face and large, pale eye ring are distinctive.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Quite common at Forsythe, where they flicked along the road edges in front of our van. This species is smaller, paler, shorter-tailed and "cleaner" faced than the superficially similar Song Sparrow.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Surprisingly few seen this year: one moved through the bottom branches of a red-stemmed weedy bush at the Meadows, and a handful of others flicked through the reeds at Forsythe. Their habit of pumping their long tails as they fly is distinctive.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

SCARLET TANAGER (*Piranga olivacea*) – A single male on our final morning at Higbee's. Though he'd traded his brilliant scarlet breeding plumage for the dull yellow of autumn, his wings were still black; a female's would have been less so.

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Common and widespread, seen regularly both in the various parks and woodlands we visited and around Cape May Point's neighborhoods.

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – We heard the squeaky "sneaker on the gym floor" call of this species on our last morning at Higbee's. [∗]

BLUE GROSBEAK (*Passerina caerulea*) – A female perched up briefly along the edge of the CMPSP parking lot one morning, but our best views came at Higbee's, where other females/youngsters perched in the open in a red-leaved sumac bush. Their big bills and rusty wing bars help to separate them from the next species.

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – Small numbers in the scruffy fields at Higbee's; occasionally sometimes bounded out of the field into the lower branches of trees along the edges. Males lose most of their distinctive blue plumage during the winter.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

BOBOLINK (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – We heard the distinctive "link link" calls of this diurnal migrant on several days, but saw them only as dark shapes flying high overhead -- when we saw them at all, that is!

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Most in small numbers, often migrating past in loose flocks early in the day. Our best up-close views came on our boat trip, when we found a male right along the edge of one of the channels.

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Surprisingly few, and all in serious tail molt. One at CMBO-Northwood's feeders gave us good views of its stout bill and yellow eye as it rummaged.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – Small numbers along coasts and around wetlands on many days, with especially nice views of several long-tailed males at Two Mile Landing. This is a bigger species than the previous one, with a distinctly sky-blue iridescence to its plumage.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – Typically seen in huge roadside flocks -- like the mob we found feeding on the edge of one of the roads near the Cape May County Airport. Unfortunately, this brood parasite is doing very well in the county, to the detriment of many local songbirds.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE (*Icterus galbula*) – A young male perched atop a tree along a field edge at Higbee's was decidedly less colorful than he'll be next spring!

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Small numbers on several days, including one gorging on sunflower seeds at the CMBO Northwood Center's feeders, and a pair with a starling flock on telephone wires near the Meadows. This formerly common species has been hard-hit by conjunctivitis (an eye disease) on the east coast. [II]

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – A little group of winter-dulled birds rested in hedgerow trees at Higbee's between feeding forays into the weedy fields below. We heard the distinctive tinkly calls of others from the picnic grove at Forsythe.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Daily, including one bouncing across the floor near the baggage carousels at the Philadelphia airport, and a noisy mob near the pool at our hotel each morning. [II]

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – A youngster in the flower border at the Wetlands Institute was very confiding, continuing to nibble while we admired it from mere feet away.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Ubiquitous, scampering up trunks and along branches -- or raiding feeders -- throughout much of Cape May county.

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – A big pod swam offshore at Coral Avenue one afternoon, their fins rising from among the waves in the rips as they hunted. Like the birds, this species migrates past Cape May in big numbers.

Herps

AMERICAN BULLFROG (*Lithobates catesbeianus*) – A few big ones, looking very green, floated in channels along one of the paths in CMPSP. The raised ridge of skin that curved down behind their eyes is a good way to separate them from the very similar Green Frog.

PAINTED TURTLE (*Chrysemys picta*) – After a quick look at us, a smallish one sank to the muddy bottom of a pond near the track in CMPSP, and disappeared under some nearby pondweed. We spotted others sunning on dead branches at Forsythe NWR.

FOWLER'S TOAD (*Anaxyrus fowleri*) – A tiny one hopped across the path in front of us at the Meadows, headed for the tall grasses on the far side. This is the only native toad in Cape May.

SOUTHERN GRAY TREEFROG (*Hyla chrysoscelis*) – We heard the loud, chirping calls of this endangered species on several days, and found one clinging to the stem of a Wool Grass plant on our walk around CMPSP.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The web address for the Doppler radar site Tom showed us on his phone during our dinner at the Merion Inn is:
<http://tempest.aos.wisc.edu/radar/uscompjs.html>.

And the web address for the home page of the Cape May Bird Observatory, which has links to the live totals of their various counts, etc. is:
<http://www.njaudubon.org/SectionCapeMayBirdObservatory/CMBOHome.aspx>.

Totals for the tour: 142 bird taxa and 3 mammal taxa