



Field Guides Tour Report

Cape May Megan's Way I 2018

Sep 22, 2018 to Sep 28, 2018

Megan Edwards Crewe

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.



We saw plenty of migrating Ospreys on this tour, including more than a few hunting over Bunker Pond at Cape May Point State Park. Photo by participant Pam Pappone.

Our week at New Jersey's southernmost tip started with a bang, with two days of wet weather. That might not sound ideal, but our experiences showed otherwise. The soggiessness meant that migrants dropped down wherever they happened to be -- and a bunch of them just happened to be over Cape May! We braved the drizzle (and some far more persistent rains) and found plenty to keep us entertained. Squadrons of Northern Parulas swarmed through trees along the edge of Lake Lily, hordes of American Redstarts flicked in the junipers outside the bird observatory, a six-pack of Cape May Warblers bounced higher and higher through some roadside trees, and small numbers of other species mingled among them, testing our ID skills. Merlins and Peregrine Falcons showed off their flight skills in the winds over Sunset Beach, while bedraggled Fish Crows looked on.

Unfortunately, the migration train came to a screeching halt once the weather cleared, but there were still birds to enjoy. An Ovenbird and a Northern Waterthrush strode, side-by-side for convenient comparison, along a leaf-strewn bank. Dozens of Northern Flickers bounded past, flashing golden underwings. A surprise (late) Canada Warbler danced through tangled vegetation along a field edge. An adult Lesser Black-backed Gull lurked among a big mixed flock of gulls and terns. Black Skimmers rose in twisting ribbons over the beach, then settled back down on the sand. A Philadelphia Vireo flitted along the edge of Higbee's parking lot with a little group of warblers, and a Yellow-throated Vireo did the same near the bird observatory. Cooper's Hawks and a few Sharp-shinned Hawks flap-flap-glided over fields and parking lots, giving us the chance to practice identifying them. A Bay-breasted Warbler, still showing traces of color on its flanks, moved through dark junipers. Shorebirds pattered along the sea front, probing the water's edge. And, of course, who will soon forget our many great dinners at all those fine Cape May restaurants!

It was great fun sharing my former "backyard" with all of you. Thanks for your good humor, enthusiasm, interest in learning and fine companionship. I hope to see you again on another adventure somewhere, some day!

-- Megan

Note that CMPSA in the following list refers to Cape May Point State Park, and Forsythe NWR is Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge.

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 small group along the edge of the spit at Stone Harbor Point (seen from Nummy Island) were among the vanguard of this species, which winters by the thousands in southern New Jersey. We saw a couple of closer birds from the Osprey on our back bay boat trip.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Common and widespread throughout, particularly at Cape May Point State Park (CMPSP) and Forsythe NWR.

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*) – Also common and widespread throughout, unfortunately. Though beautiful, these invasive aliens are really causing problems for native flora and fauna. [I]

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – A handful seen well from the Gull Pond tower at Forsythe NWR, including a female floating right near a young Common Gallinule. Unlike most of the male ducks we saw during the week, the males were already in their spectacular breeding finery.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Spatula discors*) – Two, both in nonbreeding plumage, floated among the Gadwalls on Bunker Pond one morning, and a bigger group mingled with a mixed flock at The Meadows. When they flew, we could see the distinctive powder-blue wing patches that give them their name.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*) – A trio at The Meadows, with others at Forsythe NWR. Eye color helps to distinguish males from females in nonbreeding plumage; in all garbs, adult males have bright golden eyes, while those of females are reddish-brown.

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*) – A group of five -- including several subtly handsome drakes -- paddled across Bunker Pond on our first visit to CMPSP.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Mareca americana*) – Two at The Meadows showed nicely the small bluish bills that help to identify the species. We saw more at Forsythe NWR.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – As usual, this was among the most common and widespread of the tour's ducks, seen nearly every day.

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK (*Anas rubripes*) – A few rested with a mixed flock at The Meadows, but our best views came at Forsythe NWR, which was established to help protect this declining species. Their very dark plumage -- and the lack of any white at the edge of their wing speculum -- helps to distinguish them from Mallards (or hybrids). Unfortunately, they hybridize freely with Mallards!

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Thousands and thousands floated on the impoundments at Forsythe NWR, where they overwinter in big numbers. The long, elegant shape of these long-necked, long-tailed ducks is distinctive, even when (as during our tour) the birds are still in nonbreeding plumage.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (*Anas crecca*) – A score or more floated on the ponds at The Meadows, and we saw larger numbers at Forsythe NWR. We had some good practice picking out the differences between these and the Blue-winged Teal (remember to look for that pale butterscotch patch under the tail!) at The Meadows.

BLACK SCOTER (*Melanitta americana*) – A line of drakes flew past Sunset Beach, but we had even better views of a bigger flock near the end of the jetty at Avalon. The bright orange beaks of these sea ducks are distinctive -- and eye-catching!

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – One floated and dove on CMPSP's Bunker Pond, looking small compared to the nearby ducks.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Abundant, with wavering lines passing by overhead on many days, and dozens standing (often spread-eagled) on marina walls, docks and pilings -- and on the ruins of the concrete ship at Sunset Beach.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Daily, often in small groups headed out over the Delaware Bay -- like the gang of seven we saw leaving from a point right over our hotel on our first evening on the Cape May beach. We saw others hunting in various wetlands around the county and at Forsythe NWR.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Another common species in salt marshes throughout.

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – Dozens. Scores. Hundreds! They proved particularly common at Forsythe NWR, though we also saw some big groups loafing in salt marsh areas along Cape May county's Ocean Drive.

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – A trio of youngsters at CMPSP, distinguished from the previous species by their two-toned, black-tipped blue beaks, their grayish facial lores and their yellowish legs. We saw an all-blue adult on Nummy Island, and a few others hunting in the salt marshes around the Wetlands Institute.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – Two stalked the shallow pans in the salt marsh by the Wetlands Institute, and we spotted another in flight from the Osprey on our back bay boat trip. This species breeds in Cape May county, but most are gone by the time of our tours.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – One hunted along the edge of CMPSP's Bunker Pond, hunched patiently in the shallows on a couple of different days.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – An adult among the Yellow-crowned Night-Herons at the Wetlands Institute, with much closer looks at some others in a row of trees along the canal as we started our back bay boat trip.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – A few rather distant birds -- including a barely spotted brown youngster -- on pilings and tree branches visible from the Wetlands Institute on a couple of days, with others on the salt marshes, seen during our back bay boat trip.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*) – Far less common than the next species, with only small numbers seen on several days. We got especially nice looks at a quartet checking out some roadside roadkill one afternoon, while returning from Nummy Island.

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Rocking over fields and forest daily, often in fairly sizable groups. Unlike the previous species, which hunts for carrion by sight, this one hunts primarily by smell.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Common and widespread throughout, seen in good numbers every day -- often carrying a fish snack. One of this year's youngsters was still in a nest on a channel marker in Cape May harbor, clearly hoping its parents would return with something tasty.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus hudsonius*) – Small numbers -- almost all rusty-bellied youngsters. Sharon spotted our first, over CMPSP on our first morning, but our best looks probably came at The Meadows, where one young bird quartered low over the trail right behind us. We saw another on our boat trip and two more at Forsythe NWR.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – Amazingly few this trip, with only a handful over the fields at Higbee's on two mornings. This species is smaller and squarer-tailed than the next, and typically flies with its wrists pulled slightly forward.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Much more common than the previous species, though still in smaller numbers than we normally see on this tour. We had fine looks at several in flight over the CMPSP parking lot, where we could really see their big, protruding heads, their long, rounded tails (with the broad white tail tip), and the relatively straight leading edge to their wing.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Another regular, with adults and a range of immature birds seen well. Particularly memorable were the two -- a youngster later aided and abetted by an adult -- that chased an Osprey around Forsythe NWR for a while before finally getting it to drop its fishy catch.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Another surprisingly scarce migrant, with only a few birds (possibly all residents) seen along the Garden State Parkway on our way up to Nummy Island and Forsythe NWR.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

CLAPPER RAIL (ATLANTIC COAST) (*Rallus crepitans crepitans*) – An oh-so-brief view of one sprinting across a muddy gap in the Spartina grass on our boat trip, seen only by a lucky few, with others heard at Two Mile Landing (one on each side of the road) and Forsythe NWR.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – A handful of brownish youngsters on CMPSP's Bunker Pond, with another from the Gull Pond tower at Forsythe NWR. This species is fairly uncommon in the county.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus*) – A couple flew past Sunset Beach, landing further along the shore where they foraged at the edge of the water (allowing scope views) and we saw other distant birds from Nummy Island. But our best views probably came on our boat trip, when we sailed past a few poking their way along the shoreline.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – We found a scattering of these larger plovers along the runways at the Cape May county airport and spotted a few more on Nummy Island, but our best views came on the back bay boat trip, where we found a group on some of the shallow pans in the salt marsh. A few still showed traces of their snazzy breeding plumage -- primarily in the form of still-black bellies.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – One scurried along the edge of one of the taxiways at the Cape May county airport, and we saw others on our back bay boat trip and huddled among the smaller shorebirds at Two Mile Landing. But our best views came at the Avalon seawatch, where we found a scattering of them pattering along the sand in the lee of the big stone jetty.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – One of these elegant plovers flew in and landed along a taxiway at the Cape May county airport.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – Seen in small numbers on most days, with especially nice views of a little group snoozing on the sea walls of a marina in Cape May harbor. On the various beaches we saw them on, they preferred the rocky jetties to the sand.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – A veritable army of them swarmed along the beach front in Stone Harbor, chasing the breaking waves, and we saw scores of others on the beach and jetty at Avalon. This species overwinters in Cape May in big numbers.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – We saw a small flock in flight on Nummy Island, but our best views came at the Avalon seawatch, where a handful paraded among the Sanderlings on the beach. This species is darker-backed and longer-billed than the previous.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – Several huddled at the base of the reeds on an islet in The Meadows, preening vigorously. Their darker backs and pale legs help to separate them from the next species.

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*) – Particularly common at Forsythe NWR, where they scurried over the mudflats edging the wildlife drive. We had a few others at the Avalon seawatch (looking small compared to nearby Sanderlings) and on our boat trip.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – A few on our last morning.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – A few poked and prodded along the edges of some of the channels we traversed on our boat trip, and we saw a scattering of others at Two Mile Landing.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – Several seen on our boat trip; their stiff-winged flight -- showing a bold white stripe on the upperwing -- is distinctive.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*) – Fabulous studies of a very confiding bird at the base of one of the wheelchair ramps on a rainy morning in CMPSP. It seemed to be supremely confident about the camouflage ability of its plumage -- either that, or it was really, really tired and really, really hungry.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Reasonably common throughout, with especially nice studies at the Wetlands Institute (where dozens snoozed among the plainer "western" Willets) and on our boat trip (where we found a few scurrying along the edges of the channels, chasing fish). We had others at Forsythe NWR.

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*) – Dozens dozed on grassy islets in a shallow pan near the Wetlands Institute. These were all "western" Willets, distinguished by their paler backs and longer legs. The local breeding "eastern" Willets are typically long gone by the time of our tours.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – A few at Forsythe NWR, including several in nice comparison with some nearby Greater Yellowlegs at Forsythe NWR. These are smaller, with shorter, straighter, more finely-tipped bills.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – We saw several different birds chasing terns and gulls around in "the rips" off Cape May Point; this behavior is what gives them their name, since they force the bird being chased to regurgitate its catch, thereby stealing it for themselves. Unfortunately, none of the birds was particularly close.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Abundant throughout, including dozens loafing on the county's beaches. The world's largest Laughing Gull breeding colony is in the county -- more than 30,000 pairs!

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – One with the mixed gull and tern flock on the Cape May beach our first evening, with another from the Coral Avenue dune crossover a few days later. These were the vanguard of the thousands that will arrive in the area to overwinter.

- HERRING GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – Common and widespread throughout, with virtually all ages and plumages represented well. Youngsters of this species are uniformly grayish-brown, like they've been rolled in the dust.
- LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus fuscus*) – Sharon spotted our first, an adult flashing its yellow legs on the beach across from our hotel. We saw others from the Coral Venue dune crossover on each of our visits there. This is an increasingly common species in Cape May.
- GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus marinus*) – Another common species, though inexplicably missing from the Cape May beach on our first afternoon. This is the largest gull species in the world -- as we saw when they mingled with the other "large" gulls on the county's beaches.
- CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – And this is the world's largest tern. We had especially nice views of several hunting over the rocky jetty at the Avalon seawatch, with others at Nummy Island and on our boat trip.
- COMMON TERN** (*Sterna hirundo*) – A dozen or so mingled with the more common Forster's and Royal terns in the flock across from our hotel the first evening. The dark carpal bar on their wing, and their dark caps help to distinguish them from the paler Forster's terns.
- FORSTER'S TERN** (*Sterna forsteri*) – By far the more common small tern on Cape May's beaches -- despite the previous species' name! We had especially nice views of dozens hunting in the channels edging the wildlife drive at Forsythe. The frosty-pale upperwing of this species is distinctive.
- ROYAL TERN** (*Thalasseus maximus*) – Another common species along the county's beaches, including dozens resting on the sand across from our hotel, and numerous still-begging youngsters trailing along after their parents. This species doesn't breed in New Jersey, but many head north to the county once their chicks have fledged.
- BLACK SKIMMER** (*Rynchops niger*) – Hundreds, including a gratifying number of scaly brown youngsters, rested on the sand across from our hotel, some with the mixed gull/tern flock and others in smaller groups of just skimmers. We saw a few scything their way through the shallow waters just offshore.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

- ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Daily, including the very variably plumaged flock that hung around the Cape May sea front each day. [I]
- MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*) – Also daily, including a pair that stood for long minutes on the tray feeder out in front of CMBO's Northwood Center, allowing good scope studies.

Apodidae (Swifts)

- CHIMNEY SWIFT** (*Chaetura pelagica*) – A trio winnowed over the fields at Higbee's on our final morning.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

- RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus colubris*) – Singles on most days, including one making regular visits on several mornings to the hummingbird feeder hanging near the CMPSP hawk watch platform.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

- BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – Small numbers on most days, with especially nice looks at one (both perched and hunting) at CMPSP's Bunker Pond. We heard their rattling calls regularly, particularly around Lake Lily.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

- RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – After hearing several during our walk around CMPSP, we finally connected with several at Higbee's on our morning walks there. This is a local resident, but numbers are augmented in the fall by migrants from further north.
- DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides pubescens*) – We heard one calling near the CMBO's Northwood Center one afternoon, but never saw it. [*]
- NORTHERN FLICKER** (*Colaptes auratus*) – Easily the most common woodpecker of the trip, with dozens bounding past on some of our mornings at Higbee's.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

- AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*) – Quite common, including a surprising eight in view at once at the Cape May county airport on a windy afternoon.
- MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – Very common throughout, with some thrilling encounters with half dozen or so tangling with a few Peregrine Falcons in the skies over wind-whipped Sunset Beach one morning.
- PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – Also regular through much of the tour, including some demonstrating their classic crossbow shape in the skies above CMPSP.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

- LEAST FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax minimus*) – One hunted low along the edge of one of the fields at Higbee's one morning.
- EASTERN KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) – One tried to settle in a shrubby tree not far from the hawkwatch platform, but the local Northern Mockingbirds were having none of it, and quickly chased it away. Most Eastern Kingbirds are long gone from New Jersey by the time of our tours.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

- YELLOW-THROATED VIREO** (*Vireo flavifrons*) – One with the warbler flock outside CMBO's Northwood Center one afternoon started at the top of the biggest oak trees, but eventually worked its way down into some lower branches.
- PHILADELPHIA VIREO** (*Vireo philadelphicus*) – One with a mixed flock at the corner of the parking lot at Higbee's at the end of a morning walk showed pretty well for most of us. This species isn't a particularly common migrant through Cape May.
- RED-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo olivaceus*) – This one, on the other hand, is VERY common! We saw it most days, often in little groups -- and often gobbling fruits from the Virginia Creeper vines.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

- BLUE JAY** (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Particularly common this year, as the species is currently "irrupting" from points further north. We saw dozens. Scores. Hundreds! Most were seen in flight, sometimes with acorn "snacks" firmly gripped in their beaks.
- AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – We heard them cawing from beyond the trees at Higbee's on several mornings, but never actually laid eyes on one. [*]
- FISH CROW** (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Seen principally along the county's coasts, including a big group on the roof of the building across from our hotel one morning. The call of this species is a distinctively nasal "car".

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Seen on most days, though in far smaller numbers than I would have expected for this time of year; hopefully, they're just a bit late! This species is typically the latest swallow to migrate, as they'll eat fruit as well as insects.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – A few folks got on one as it swooped past the Osprey during our boat trip.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Common and approachable, with especially nice studies of several visiting the CMBO's feeders outside the Northwood Center.

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – Surprisingly, we didn't find our first until we ran into two with a flock of Chipping Sparrows near the fire station at the Cape May county airport. They responded very well to my whistles and came right in over our heads. We saw others at CMBO's Northwood Center the following day.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – Another species having an irruption year this year; though it's probably hard for you to believe, we see few (if any) on the tour in some years!

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – One flitted through a brush pile at Higbee's, giving us something to look at while we waited for the Canada Warbler to dance back into view.

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – As usual, we heard plenty of these before we finally spotted one. Fortunately, a pair at Cox Hall Creek WMA proved very accommodating, perching for long minutes at eye level right in the open. We saw another at Higbee's.

Poliophtidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – One with the mixed warbler flock outside CMBO's Northwood Center spent a few moments dancing along a telephone wire before returning to the trees.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – One with the mixed warbler / chickadee flock outside CMBO's Northwood Center was among the first to respond to some pishing -- nice spotting, Sharon!

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – A handful hunted among the pines near the fire station at the Cape May County airport, keeping company with a mob of Chipping Sparrows.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Including a very young, still spotty youngster huddled in the leaf of a shrub on a windy afternoon in Stone Harbor, and several adults in the trees around the fields at Higbee's.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Seen on most days, particularly along the scrubby edges of the fields at Higbee's and around the parking lot at CMPSP. Their distinctive meowing calls were a regular part of the tour's soundtrack.

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*) – One near CMBO's Northwood Center on our first morning, with others at Cox Hall Creek WMA. This species breeds in big numbers in the pine barrens of central New Jersey.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Regular throughout, particularly around the parking lots at CMPSP; we were regularly serenaded during our picnic lunches there!

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Quite common all across the county, including plenty of youngsters molting into their speckly winter plumage. [1]

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Small flyover groups on several days around CMBO's Northwood Center. The big push of these handsome birds tends to be slightly later in the fall.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

OVENBIRD (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – One strutted around on a little hillside in the back garden at CMBO Northwood, its tail cocked up like that of a bantam chicken. It took some patience (since the bird seemed to have a strong preference for areas out of our view) but we all eventually got nice looks at that bold eye ring and russet head stripe.

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – And we saw that Ovenbird right beside one of these, which was also striding around on the same little hillside, allowing nice comparisons. This one was darker-backed and slimmer, with a bold, pale eyebrow rather than an eye-ring.

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – Small numbers on most days, crawling up tree trunks and along branches at CMBO's Northwood Center and at Higbee's. Studies have shown that males tend to stick to the trunks and bigger branches of trees while females prefer the smaller branches and twigs.

NASHVILLE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*) – A few folks got on one outside the CMBO's Northwood Center and some spotted another feeding low along the track at The Meadows.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – One of the most common warblers of the trip, seen every day but our first -- typically flitting through the low weeds along the edges of paths and roads. We saw only a few adult males.

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Another common species (particularly on our first two mornings) and another one where we saw far more females and youngsters than we did adult males.

CAPE MAY WARBLER (*Setophaga tigrina*) – Our first was a rather drab female along the shores of Lake Lily, part of a big mixed warbler flock we found on our first morning. We found a group of six or so in some junipers just down the road from the CMBO's Northwood Center on one of our visits there, and at least a few of them continued to hang around for another few days. This species was first described from a specimen collected in Cape May, but it's one of the less common warblers of the fall there.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – This species, on the other hand, was very common -- particularly on the first couple of wet days, when we found big mixed flocks of warblers working along the edge of Lake Lily and around the CMBO's Northwood Center. The small size and very short tail of this species make it distinctive in flight.

MAGNOLIA WARBLER (*Setophaga magnolia*) – A lone bird among the plentiful Northern Parulas in a flock along the edge of Lake Lily on our first morning was frustratingly elusive, showing well for some and not at all for others.

BAY-BREASTED WARBLER (*Setophaga castanea*) – One among the hordes of warblers flicking through the trees outside CMBO's Northwood Center one afternoon still had some pink on his sides. This was another late migrant; typically they're long gone by the time of our tours.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – Small numbers on most days, including a couple of females with the big mixed warbler flock along the edge of Lake Lily.

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) – One in the roadside trees in front of CMBO's Northwood Center showed well its habit of cocking its long tail up, rather like a wren might. The chartreuse-green back and bold white eye ring are also helpful ID features.

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – Quite common, particularly around the Northwood Center. Compared to the small, tubby Northern Parulas, this is a pretty big warbler -- as they probably have to be, to survive their arduous over-water migration to South America.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – Both males and females, showing their distinctive white wing patches (their "pocket handkerchief") flitted low through the bushes around the Northwood Center on several days.

PALM WARBLER (*Setophaga palmarum*) – Regular along the dune edge at CMPSP and the field edges at Higbee's, where they drew our attention with their constantly-moving tails. We saw both the bright yellow eastern forms (*hypochrysea*) and the drabber khaki-colored western ones (*palmarum*).

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (*Setophaga coronata*) – A couple of very drab youngsters around the Northwood Center one day marked the beginning of the end of warbler migration; this is typically the last warbler species to arrive in Cape May -- and only one that spends the winter here in large numbers.

PRAIRIE WARBLER (*Setophaga discolor*) – Richard Crossley spotted one for us one afternoon near the Northwood Center; it sat up near the top of a juniper between the road and Lake Lily for 30 seconds or so before moving off towards the building and disappearing.

CANADA WARBLER (*Cardellina canadensis*) – This one was a surprise! We were working our way through a little mixed flock at the edge of one of the fields at Higbee's when this one popped into view; that black necklace and big white eye ring certainly caught our eyes! And our find made some nearby birders mighty happy as well.

Passerellidae (New World Buntings and Sparrows)

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – Dozens -- including many youngsters -- flitted through the pine trees near the fire house at the Cape May County airport, occasionally dropping to the ground to rummage for grass seeds.

FIELD SPARROW (*Spizella pusilla*) – Two in a bush at the edge of the Sunset Beach parking lot were very cooperative, sitting right out in the open for long minutes while we studied them in the scope. This small sparrow's blank face is distinctive.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Quite common along the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR, typically scrounging through the weeds along the road edge.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

SCARLET TANAGER (*Piranga olivacea*) – Brief views of one outside the CMBO's Northwood Center, with another that Bonnie spotted for us at Higbee's. Male Scarlet Tanagers lose their dramatic coloring for the winter.

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Common throughout, with good looks at many, particularly around the Northwood Center's feeders and along the field edges at Higbee's.

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – After hearing their "sneaker on the gym floor" squeak for days, we were finally rewarded with good sightings of at least 8 birds -- all females or young males -- at Higbee's one morning.

BLUE GROSBEAK (*Passerina caerulea*) – A couple of birds -- likely a female and a youngster -- flicked through one of the fields at Higbee's. Their larger size and heavier bills -- as well as the rufous wing bars -- help to separate them from the next species.

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – A few at CMPSP on our first morning there.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

BOBOLINK (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – Unfortunately, most of the birds we saw were little more than bounding dots heading south high overhead. Some of the group did get brief views of one, looking like a giant sparrow, on a reed head at The Meadows, but it dropped down out of view before everybody found it.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE (*Icterus galbula*) – One near the top of one of the larger trees at the edge of the first field at Higbee's was a nice start to a morning's walk there -- good spotting, Marsha!

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Flocks overhead on most days -- looking decidedly two-toned -- with others rising out of the reed beds at Forsythe NWR and then dropping back in.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – A trio waddled along the edge of the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR with a big flock of Red-winged Blackbirds.

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Small numbers on most days, particularly at Cox Hall Creek WMA. Most were in pretty heavy molt -- particularly of their long, keel-shaped tails.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – Especially nice views of some on our boat trip -- including a few males having a sky-pointing competition on one of the fishing boats near the dock -- with others at Forsythe NWR. This species is larger than the previous one, with a long bill and a "flat-headed" appearance.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – A few birds at a feeder in a garden in Cape May Point, seen as we crawled along in the van looking for flocks. We saw at least one bright male and a couple of brown females/youngsters. [1]

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – A few in the trees near the start of CMPSP's Yellow trail (just as we came in off the beach) with others at Higbee's.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Regular around the hotel, with a few others in the CMPSP parking lot. [1]

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – At least one nibbled on the grassy lawn of our hotel most mornings, and we spotted another at the Wetlands Institute.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Abundant throughout, including a few around the feeders at CMBO's Northwood Center (where the various baffles didn't seem to be slowing them down at all) and others in the wooded areas of CMPSP.

Herps

PAINTED TURTLE (*Chrysemys picta*) – A couple of small individuals rested on a log near the entrance to Forsythe NWR, dwarfed by the next species. The yellow facial and neck stripes of this species help to distinguish it.

NORTHERN RED-BELLIED TURTLE (*Pseudemys rubriventris*) – At least 8 or so of these larger turtles shared a log with the previous species near the start of the Forsythe entrance drive. Their red bellies were clearly visible -- as were their overall dark heads and necks.

DIAMONDBACK TERRAPIN (*Malaclemys terrapin*) – We spotted a few lounging on the edges of the canal, across from the Osprey dock on our boat trip.

SOUTHERN GRAY TREEFROG (*Hyla chrysoscelis*) – We heard the distinctive croaks of this endangered species on several days, but couldn't track down the singers. [*]

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

We had a couple of crabs on the tour:

The Atlantic Ghost Crab (*Ocypode quadrata*) is the only species of ghost crab found along the Atlantic coast of the United States. This was the sizable pale crab that kept an eye (or two!) on us from the mouth of its burrow along the Coral Avenue dune crossover. Their burrows can be more than 4 feet long!

The Atlantic Marsh Fiddlers (*Uca pugnax*) were the small crabs we saw in the salt marshes -- particularly where we looked for our Clapper Rails. They get their name from the male's single oversized claw, which is used for both fighting and waving displays.

Totals for the tour: 130 bird taxa and 2 mammal taxa