



Field Guides Tour Report

Cape May Megan's Way II 2018

Sep 30, 2018 to Oct 6, 2018

Megan Edwards Crewe

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Getting up close and personal with a flock of Black Skimmers (and friends) on the Cape May beach was rewarding. Photo by guide Megan Edwards Crewe.

Migration birding in Cape May is all about the weather and, somewhat unfortunately, we had sunny blue skies and mild southwest breezes for much of the week. That's comfortable for the birders and helpful to the migrating birds, but NOT so great if you're trying to enjoy the spectacle of migration! With settled weather and gentle breezes, birds don't get pushed to the coast, or they carry on flying right past Cape May Point if they do. However, despite the lack of significant visible migration for most of the week, we certainly weren't left bird-less. After all, even a tough day's birding in Cape May is better than a good day in most other places! And despite the weather, we had many nice encounters.

An unexpected Lapland Longspur shuffled through a low patch of weedy grass, nibbling seeds. A Cackling Goose snoozed among a big flock of Canada Geese. Several White-rumped Sandpipers foraged among a mass of smaller peeps, sinking up to their "knees" in the mud. Two adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls rested among a mob of gulls and terns, their bright yellow legs nicely visible. A drake Eurasian Wigeon played peekaboo in a reed bed at the far end of Bunker Pond. Hundreds (thousands?) of Semipalmated Sandpipers and Dunlins huddled, sleeping along a narrow bank -- talk about a challenging jigsaw puzzle! A Seaside Sparrow hitched its way up several reed stems, peering about with its tail cocked firmly skyward, while a less cooperative Saltmarsh Sparrow lurked in thicker growth nearby. A Carolina Wren chortled from a dead branch. Two Bald Eagles plummeted earthwards, talons interlocked as they spiraled. Hundreds of Black Skimmers dozed on a sandy beach, alongside a convenient mix of Royal, Forster's and Common terns. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo sat motionless in a tiny tree.

Dapper American Oystercatchers gathered on a jetty. Hundreds of Sanderlings pattered along the shoreline, racing the waves up and down the beach until a dive-bombing Peregrine Falcon stirred them into twisting, writhing flight -- and when they eventually returned to the beach, they flowed like water across the rocky jetty in front of us. Two Glossy Ibis huddled among hundreds of egrets, their long, down-curved bills visible as they preened. A trio of Cape May Warblers -- two drab youngsters and a still-bright male -- posed in a treetop. On one gorgeous, hot, sunny day, the sky was full of raptors: pugnacious Merlins and dainty American Kestrels shared airspace (sometimes only yards over our heads), a handful Broad-winged Hawks turned circles in thermals with Ospreys and Red-tailed Hawks and the ubiquitous Turkey Vultures, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks flap-flap-glided over forests and parking lots, allowing nice comparison. Northern Harriers danced over the marshes, Bald Eagles of all ages soared past, and Peregrine Falcons demonstrated their classic crossbow shape as they glided overhead. Though passerine migration was somewhat slower, we managed to rack up 14 species of warbler, including a Nashville that enlivened a quiet afternoon walk, a treetop Black-throated Green, plenty of Northern Parulas, and a knockout, point-blank male Black-throated Blue on our last morning.

Thanks to all of you for coping with the occasionally quiet mornings and the sometimes humid afternoons -- and for your excellent spotting and interest in learning. It was great fun sharing my former "backyard" with you all! I hope to see you again on another adventure somewhere, some day.

Note that CMPSP 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)

SNOW GOOSE (*Anser caerulescens*) – Two stood out among a big flock of Canada Geese at Shunpike Pond.

BRANT (*Branta bernicla*) – Two of these arctic breeders rested on a small sandbar in the back bay at Two Mile Landing, looming over the nearby shorebirds. These were among the vanguard of the hordes that will arrive to southern New Jersey later in the fall.

ACKLING GOOSE (*Branta hutchinsii*) – One snoozing among the big group of resting Canada Geese at Shunpike Pond was a surprise; this is a rare vagrant in Cape May, and typically seen much later in the autumn. It was great to be able to directly compare it with its much larger (and longer-necked and longer-billed) neighbors.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Abundant and widespread throughout the county, with others nibbling grass right on the side of the road as we drove around the Walt Whitman bridge cloverleaf on our way to the airport our last afternoon.

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*) – Unfortunately, far too many on the freshwater ponds around Cape May county (and at Forsythe NWR). Though beautiful, these invasive aliens are causing real problems for native flora and fauna. [H]

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – Five zoomed past as we birded in the parking lot at Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area (WMA) one morning, but our best views came at Forsythe NWR, where a handful floated among the lily pads on a couple of ponds visible from the Gull Pond tower.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Spatula discors*) – One floated among a little group of drake Gadwalls on Cape May Point State Park's (CMPSP) Bunker Pond one morning, and a few others mingled with the Northern Shovelers at The Meadows. The pale patch at the base of their all-dark bill -- and their darkly-spotted undertail coverts -- help to separate them from other female/eclipse-plumaged ducks.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*) – A few on Bunker Pond and a sprinkling of others at Forsythe NWR, but our best views -- by far -- came at The Meadows, where some 20 or so (all in eclipse plumage) allowed us to study them at leisure through the scope; we could even determine the number of golden-eyed males and red-eyed females.

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*) – Regular in small numbers in the southern locations on the tour, with scores floating on the impoundments at Forsythe NWR. Many were drakes already in their breeding finery, and we spent some time enjoying the subtle beauty of their plumage in the scope.

EURASIAN WIGEON (*Mareca penelope*) – Arg! A drake on Bunker Pond proved rather frustrating, paddling out of view almost as soon as we'd located him on a couple of occasions. A few folks got a look in the scope, and some got it in their binoculars, but many missed him entirely.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Mareca americana*) – A pair with some Mallards on a small pond at CMPSP, with larger numbers at Forsythe. None of the males were showing their snazzy breeding plumage yet.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – As usual, one of the most common and widespread ducks of the tour, seen on most days in most wet places. Most of the males were starting to show signs of their breeding plumage (and some seemed to be paired up already), but none were at their finest.

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK (*Anas rubripes*) – Plenty at Forsythe NWR, which is a stronghold for the species in New Jersey; the refuge was actually established to help protect and enhance the species numbers. We had good scope looks at the wings of several, which showed clearly the black-bordered bluish-purple speculum.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Thousands and thousands and THOUSANDS at Forsythe NWR, with another individual snoozing among the Northern Shovelers at The Meadows. The long neck and long tail of this elegant species are distinctive.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (*Anas crecca*) – Dozens floated around the fringes of a big Northern Pintail flock at Forsythe NWR, looking tiny by comparison. The pale butterscotch undertail coverts of this species help to quickly separate them from the larger Blue-winged Teal.

BLACK SCOTER (*Melanitta americana*) – Lines of birds winged past along several beaches (Stone Harbor Point and CMPSP) and a small raft of them floated in the surf off Cape May beach near the Second Avenue jetty. Though most were males (showing their striking orange beaks, even at a distance), we spotted a few browner females among the groups. This is the most commonly seen of New Jersey's scoters.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – Two on Bunker Pond on a couple of days, once floating with some Gadwalls, the other time snoozing along the pond edge not far from the trail. The small size and stiff tail of this species are distinctive.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – A little group in a yard near Woodbury were an unexpected bonus of our "get around the crash site" detour en route to the airport on our last afternoon.

Gaviidae (Loons)

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – One flew over, headed for Delaware, as we arrived at Cape May's convention center on our search for Black Skimmers.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – At least one floated among the ducks on CMPSP's Bunker Pond, and we spotted others diving in the impoundments at Forsythe NWR. During the non-breeding season, this species loses its distinctive pied bill.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Abundant throughout, with wavering skeins passing overhead, youngsters drying out atop the remains of the concrete ship and plenty resting on the sea walls around the marinas in Cape May Harbor. This is the common cormorant in south Jersey, migrating through the area by the hundreds of thousands.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Daily in small numbers, including one doing its best Purple Swamphen imitation along the edge of Bunker Pond.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Also common and widespread and seen daily -- including many score in the marshy borders of the Forsythe impoundments and one balanced on one long black leg on a concrete sluice gate along the wildlife drive.

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – Another regular species, almost ridiculously common at Forsythe, with clusters of dozens resting along the wildlife drive and others stalking the shallows in south Jersey's back bays. The bright yellow lores of this species help to separate them from the less-common immature Little Blue Herons.

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – A snowy-white youngster prowling the edge of one of the plover ponds at CMPSP showed well the black-tipped bluish bill and grayish lores that help to separate it from the previous species. We saw a trio of full blue adults in the salt marsh around the Wetlands Institute.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – A couple of late birds hunted in the salt marsh behind the Willets at the Wetlands Institute and a couple of others did the same on Nummy Island. We found two more on our back bay boat trip. Most of the summer breeding population is gone by the time of our trip.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – Susan found both of our birds -- one hunting the shallows along the edge of Bunker Pond (seen from the hawkwatch platform) and a second winging across one of CMPSP's plover ponds. Nice spotting!

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Five flushed from some low bushes in the salt marsh near the Osprey boat dock and flew around for a bit, entertaining us as we waited for our back bay boat trip to begin, and we saw a few others in one of the big egret roosts near the end of the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – One with a crab along the edge of the back bay's salt marsh, seen from the Osprey as we made our way back towards the end of our trip. The white cheek patch helps to quickly distinguish adults from adults of the previous species.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – At least two huddled near the feet of a big roosting group of Snowy and Great Egrets in the dense reeds edging one of the impoundments at Forsythe NWR. With patience, we were able to see their distinctive down-curved bills -- and the brown eyes that separate them from the occasional vagrant White-faced Ibis.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*) – Seen every day but our first afternoon, in much smaller numbers than the next species. Several circling over the canal on our back bay boat trip showed nicely the shorter tails and wings (and much quicker flaps) that help to identify them.

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Common and widespread, including some rocking over trees and fields on our long drive south from the airport and a big kettle spiraling over The Meadows one morning, slowly gaining height. Cape May has a sizable local population, but many others migrate through.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Daily (except for our first afternoon), including some carrying fish and plenty of now-empty nests on various channel markers and utility poles. This is another common local breeder with many more migrating through.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus hudsonius*) – Small numbers on most days, including one rusty-bellied youngster coursing low over the path at The Meadows, and a trio of others over the impoundments at Forsythe NWR. The long, narrow wings and tail of this species are distinctive -- as is the white rump patch.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – Most days (except the first afternoon), always in much smaller numbers than the next species, with nice comparisons between the two at Higbee Beach WMA (Higbee's) and over the CMPSP parking lot. The overall trend of this species in the past few decades has been steadily downwards, and 2017 recorded the fewest birds in October since the count began in 1976.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Very common throughout, with truly impressive numbers on our big hawk flight day. This species is larger than the previous; in flight, it shows a more protruding head, a straighter leading edge to the wing straight flight, a rounder tail tip (with a broad white terminal band) and a stiffer flap.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – A good variety of ages and plumages, from this year's youngsters to full adults. Particularly impressive were the two we saw plummeting earthwards with their talons locked at The Meadows -- great spotting, Eric!

BROAD-WINGED HAWK (*Buteo platypterus*) – A handful circled in a thermal high above The Meadows, allowing nice comparison to the Red-tailed Hawks, accipiters and Ospreys sharing the sky with them.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Seen daily, but only in small numbers -- which is unusual at this time of year! We had especially nice views of several soaring over The Meadows one morning, with others along the highway on our way up to Forsythe NWR.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

CLAPPER RAIL (ATLANTIC COAST) (*Rallus crepitans crepitans*) – Arg! A last-ditch effort to find one led to our briefly HEARING one at Two Mile Landing. Unfortunately, it only called once -- so anybody who didn't get it that time didn't get it. [*]

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – An adult chugged back and forth across one of the impoundments at Forsythe NWR, hanging around a tall stand of reeds in the company of a nearby duck. This is an uncommon fall migrant.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus*) – One flew past at Two Mile Landing, showing nicely its flashy black and white wings on the afternoon we found the Lapland Longspur, and we had another towering over the Sanderlings at Stone Harbor Point. But the real numbers came on our back bay boat trip, when we found 50 or more snoozing on the rocky south jetty of Cape May's harbor.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Dozens of distant birds stood scattered across a sand bar visible from Two Mile landing on the afternoon we looked for the Lapland Longspur. We got much closer looks at some from the Osprey on our back bay boat trip, and even closer views of one skulking around in the same spot as the longspur a couple of days later. The black "armpits" of this species are distinctive in flight -- particularly in non-breeding plumage.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Small numbers on many days, including a handful among the Semipalmated Sandpipers at Two Mile Landing on each of our visits and one scuttling along the beach at Stone Harbor Point.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – A duo flew past, calling loudly, over the CMPSP plover ponds one morning, and a flock of a dozen or so did the same over the Morning Flight platform on our last morning at Higbee's.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – A handful of birds prowled the rocky jetties at Stone Harbor Point, probing for tidbits, and a resting flock of several dozen hunkered on the docks and walls of a marina in the Cape May harbor. Most were already in the drabber non-breeding plumage, but those bright orange legs are still eye-catching!

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Staggering numbers along the beach at Stone Harbor Point, including a river of them flowing over the rocky jetty as they returned after the Peregrine stirred them all up. We saw a trio of others among a group of Semipalmated Sandpipers during our back bay boat trip.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – We spotted a few with a big mixed flock of shorebirds on our back bay boat trip, but our best views came at Forsythe NWR, where dozens probed the muddy edges of one of the impoundments. Some still showed traces of the black bellies of their breeding plumage, and one or two still showed a few rusty feathers on their backs. Like the previous species, this is a common wintering bird along Cape May's beaches.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – A single bird squatted on a rocky jetty at Stone Harbor Point, allowing nice scope studies of its dark brown back, finely-pointed bill and pale legs and good comparisons to the nearby Semipalmated and Western sandpipers. We saw other singletons at The Meadows and on our back bay boat trip.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER (*Calidris fuscicollis*) – At least three foraged among a huge flock of Semipalmated Sandpipers at Forsythe NWR, showing nicely their larger size, longer wings, plumage differences and heavier weight -- they were sinking up to their "knees" in the mud while the smaller Semipalmateds were trotting around on the muddy surface!

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – Our first was a quick flyby, seen only by a few over the CMPSP plover ponds one morning. Fortunately, we found two on the deck with Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, allowing nice comparisons.

SEMI-PALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*) – Easily the most common of the tour's peeps, seen in huge numbers at Forsythe NWR -- how about that tightly-massed sleeping flock of nearly 1000 along the beach! -- with smaller numbers at Stone Harbor Point, Two Mile Landing and The Meadows.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – A little group paused on a rocky jetty at Stone Harbor Point, but departed in great haste when the Peregrine made its raking pass; they were replaced by Semipalmated Sandpipers when birds returned. We saw others mixed among the big Semipalmated Sandpiper flocks at Forsythe NWR.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – One slept among the Western Willets at the Wetlands Institute, and another stood with a flock of Greater and Lesser yellowlegs along the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR. We could see the distinctive white wedge up the latter's back when a hunting Peregrine stirred up the flock.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Regular throughout, including close to 100 resting on the shallow pan at the Wetlands Institute, one sharing space with a Lesser Yellowlegs and a couple of Pectoral Sandpipers at The Meadows and dozens hunting, preening and snoozing in the impoundments and channels at Forsythe NWR.

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*) – More than 100 snoozed among the short vegetation in a shallow pan at the Wetlands Institute. All were "Western Willets", which are paler-backed and longer-legged than the birds that breed in NJ during the summer.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – Nice studies of one at The Meadows, conveniently close to its larger cousin, with another huddled among a gang of Greater Yellowlegs at Forsythe NWR. The smaller size, more delicate build and shorter, more finely pointed bill were all easy to see.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Abundant throughout, in virtually all possible plumages. There were plenty of youngsters lounging on the beaches around Cape May, suggesting that the locals had a reasonable breeding season this year.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – A few of these winter visitors were already sprinkled among the other gulls on various beaches; most were full adults. They breed far to the north of Cape May.

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – Another common and widespread species in Cape May, with all ages (and plumages) well-represented. We saw plenty of grubby-looking brown youngsters on the beaches, and had close looks at some adults snoozing along the marina walls in the Cape May harbor on our back bay boat trip.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – We found at least four birds -- a couple of adults and some immature birds -- on our visit to Stone Harbor Point, with others at Forsythe NWR. But our best views came on the Cape May beach near the Second Avenue jetty, where a couple of adults rested with a gang of Laughing Gulls, showing nicely their distinctively long wings and bright yellow legs.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*) – Common throughout, particularly on the beaches around Cape May Point. This brute is the world's largest gull, capable of tackling an American Coot or an adult Atlantic Puffin!

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – And this is the world's largest tern! We saw some tracking back and forth along the tideline at Stone Harbor Point, with a couple of others hunting over the impoundments at Forsythe NWR. Eric spotted others offshore at CMPSP one morning.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – A few among a big group of Forster's and Royal terns (and plenty of Laughing Gulls and Black Skimmers) near the Cape May convention center one morning, distinguished by their dark carpal bars, dark primaries and black caps. Most Common Terns have already headed south by the time of our tours.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – Dozens. Scores. Hundreds! These small, pale terns hunted over the coast, the back bays, the impoundments at Forsythe NWR -- just about every salty and brackish body of water we visited! Their frosty wingtips and black eye patches make them easy to separate from the previous species, which is definitely not the case in the breeding season!

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*) – Two -- an adult and a still-begging youngster -- flew past at Stone Harbor Point, and we saw plenty of others in the big gull and tern roosts on the beaches of Cape May.

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – Hundreds rested on the Cape May beach near the convention center, with plenty of speckly brown youngsters scattered among the tuxedo-clad adults. It was fun watching some of them scything through the surf.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Daily, including a big flock on the roofs of buildings near our hotel on several days. [1]

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaidura macroura*) – Also daily, typically perched on wires along various roadways -- though sometimes rocketing past over fields and wetlands.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos).

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus americanus*) – Our first was a sneaky bird that flew towards us along the path at CMPSP then slipped through a series of trees nearby, showing well for some and not at all for others. Fortunately, we found a much more cooperative individual a bit further along the same path. It sat stock-still in a tiny tree near the edge of an open field, allowing good long scope views. Some of the gang spotted another from the Forsythe NWR parking lot before lunch.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds).

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*) – A few lingering youngsters, including one defending (and visiting) the feeder just off the CMPSP hawkwatch platform and another impressively plump bird sitting on the feeder at CMBO's Northwood Center.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers).

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – Regular in small numbers throughout, including a female that sat on the taller white post in CMPSP's Bunker Pond each day -- fortunately flying off occasionally so I could prove she was real! We watched others hovering over the impoundments at Forsythe NWR and saw a few flashing along the Cape May canal on our boat trip.

Picidae (Woodpeckers).

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – Good looks at both perched and flying birds at Higbee's, with others at CMPSP -- close enough we could even check out their red nasal tufts! The white crescents in their wings are distinctive in flight.

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – We spotted a couple of youngsters near the Higbee's parking lot on our first visit. The long white wing stripe on their folded wing is diagnostic for all species of sapsuckers -- even when they don't yet have their distinctive face stripes!

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – A calling bird accompanied a mixed flock around the CMBO Northwood Center, periodically posing in the open. She showed best on our last morning visit as she hitched her way up several trunks in the back garden.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Flybys seen on a couple of mornings at Higbee's, where their high-pitched "PEEK" calls drew our attention. We had another fly past at Hidden Valley during our stroll around the first field.

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – Very common every day but our first afternoon along the coast, with dozens bounding over fields and forest most mornings. We had great views of both perched and flying birds, and I think it's safe to say that everyone could identify them from just about every angle by the last day!

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras).

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Some very nice flight days, with dozens of birds winging past. This is the smallest of the three falcons we see in Cape May, with (proportionately) the longest tail. Some of the views we got from the CMPSP hawkwatch were pretty outstanding!

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – Even more common than the previous species, with dozens strafing tree tops and marshes all across the county. These small, dark falcons are pretty fierce, even jousting with species larger than themselves!

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – Common and widespread throughout the tour, with plenty seen well in flight, where their distinctive crossbow shape was easily seen. We got a good feel for their tremendous speed when the massive flock of Sanderlings lifted off the Stone Harbor Point beach with one dive-bombing bird in hot pursuit. Wow! And we had scope studies of one perched in a tree at Forsythe NWR.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers).

EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus virens*) – One hunting from trees high above us in the back garden at CMBO's Northwood Center was one of the last new birds of the trip.

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – This species seemed to be migrating through in waves; they were very common on some days, and completely absent on others. One hunting from the nets at the hawk banding station in CMPSP was particularly memorable as were the birds flitting along the field edges at Higbee's one morning, chasing each other and various passing insects. That regular tail pump is a good behavioral field mark.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis).

RED-EYED VIREO (*Vireo olivaceus*) – Regular throughout, typically with warblers in mixed flocks. They seemed particularly fond of Virginia Creeper berries!

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies).

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – If we had a dollar for every one we saw, we could probably have paid for most of our trips! This is a big irruption year for Blue Jays, so the number migrating through Cape May is even higher than usual. Seeing one in the hand at the CMBO banding station was a special treat.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Small numbers away from the coast, particularly at Higbee's (where we heard them long before we saw them) and Hidden Valley, with others near the raptor banding station at CMPSP.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Common and widespread, including several sizable groups along the coast -- both near our hotel and around the marinas in Cape May harbor. Their nasal "car car" calls helps to quickly separate them from their larger cousins, as does their habit of hanging out in large flocks.

Alaudidae (Larks).

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – Eight or so huddled in the shade of some of the directional signs along the Cape May County airport runways, avoiding the toasty midday sun -- unlike us, who didn't have the sense!!

Hirundinidae (Swallows).

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Steadily increasing numbers as the week went by, with a good "aerial plankton" experience over CMBO's Northwood Center late one afternoon.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – A single bird seen by some among a big group of Tree Swallows over the plover ponds at CMPSP. Most Barn Swallows are long gone by the time of our tours.

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – Another single bird, seen by some with the same swallow flock as the previous species.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice).

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Regular throughout, including some very showy birds at the feeder in front of the CMBO's Northwood Center. This species has less white on its wing than does the more northerly Black-capped Chickadee (which occurs north of Newark in New Jersey), plus a four-note rather than two-note song, and a "chick-a-dee-dee" call that is nearly a full octave higher in pitch.

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – Also regular, often in mixed flocks with the preceding species; as with the chickadees, titmice flocks often attract migrants looking for somebody with local knowledge of good foraging spots.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – Very common this year, which isn't always the case with this irruptive species. No such problems this year though; we typically found multiple birds investigating the same branches! We had flight views of many over the fields and parking lot at Higbee's; they sure look stumpy-tailed in flight.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*) – One hitched its way up the trunk of a big cherry tree at Higbee's on our first morning there, and we heard another calling neat the Higbee's parking lot later in the tour.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – We heard one calling from a hedgerow at Higbee's one morning, but never laid eyes on it. [!]

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – Super views of a couple flicking through the dead and mangled reeds (with a much less showy Swamp Sparrow) near the west path at The Meadows. They sat repeatedly right up at the top of various stems and clumps, giving us plenty of opportunity for study.

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – After only hearing this common -- and noisy -- species on our first full day, we had many fine encounters with them the rest of the week. One right in the open, singing from a dead branch at Higbee's, was particularly satisfying.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – One flitted along the edge of Lake Lily near the CMBO Northwood Center one afternoon, part of a big mixed flocks -- great spotting, Susan! We found another with a mixed flock at Higbee's a couple of days later. The almost non-stop wing flicking of this small species is a good behavioral field mark.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – A couple of birds, including a gloriously blue male, hunted from some big oaks out behind the Cape May Brewery one hot and sunny late morning, accompanying a big flock of Chipping Sparrows. A hard winter several years ago greatly reduced the bluebird population of south Jersey.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Small numbers in flight over The Meadows one morning, with a few others at Forsythe NWR -- and one bright male sitting high in a Black Walnut tree on our last morning at Higbee's. This species overwinters by the thousands in south Jersey.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Quite common throughout the week, particularly along the hedgerows at Higbee's and around our picnic lunch shelter at CMPSP. We even got a look at the often-hidden rusty vent when one perched out in the open facing us at Higbee's.

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*) – A couple in a leafless tree at the top of the Higbee's impoundment (seen during our search for the reported Upland Sandpiper) with others in the hedgerows around the fields there -- plus in the dunes at Stone Harbor Point and in the gardens around the CMBO's Northwood Center.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Common and widespread, particularly around the CMPSP parking lot and in the scrubby areas of The Meadows. Surprisingly, we get a fair few migrants through Cape May.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Abundant throughout, including plenty of youngsters already trading their plain brown juvenile plumage for spottier garb. [I]

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Several tightly packed flocks flew over Higbee's, calling their distinctively high-pitched calls. Unfortunately, we never did find one perched.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

LAPLAND LONGSPUR (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – Sweet! Getting word of one of these rare fall migrants on our very first afternoon was a treat -- particularly when it proved to be so darned approachable! We had fabulous views as it nibbled weed seeds at the edge of a paved track at Two Mile Landing.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – One shot across the path at The Meadows while we waited for the banders to return, and flitted through a holly tree below the Morning Flight platform at Higbee's. But our best view was an up-close-and-personal study of one in the hand of Scott Whittle -- one of the authors of "The Warbler Guide" -- who proceeded to show us in detail how to tell it apart from the Louisiana Waterthrush.

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – Small numbers on several days, typically as part of mixed flocks. We found one with a few other warblers along the edge of Lake Lily across from CMBO's Northwood Center late one morning, a couple of others with a chickadee and titmouse flock near our picnic lunch spot at Forsythe NWR and two more with a mixed warbler flock on a field edge at Hidden Valley.

NASHVILLE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*) – A confiding bird with a mixed warbler flock along the edge of a field at Hidden Valley was a highlight of our walk there; it spent long minutes investigating bare branches and twigs right in front of us.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Small numbers low along the edges of the fields at Higbee's, Hidden Valley and CMPSP, including a few bandit-masked males.

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Daily (except for our first afternoon) in small numbers. Most were females (or young males), but we did spot a couple of black-and-orange males. It takes two years for males to reach their full, bold colors; they then keep that plumage for the rest of their lives.

CAPE MAY WARBLER (*Setophaga tigrina*) – Yay! For a while, it looked like we might miss Cape May's namesake; fortunately, the appearance of several migrants at the top of a tree near the Higbee's parking lot saved us from that fate. One of the birds was an adult male, still showing signs of its breeding plumage. One of the others was a VERY drab young female.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – A single bird flicked along the edge of Lake Lily (just across from the CMBO's Northwood Center) on our first afternoon, while others explored treetops along the hedgerows at Higbee's and another shared a leafless tree with a Nashville Warbler at Hidden Valley.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – We spotted a female with a mixed flock at CMBO's Northwood Center on our first morning. Females are uniformly yellow, completely lacking in wingbars, eye rings, eye stripes, etc.

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – Among the most common warblers for the week, nearly always as part of mixed flocks. This species has an extraordinary migration route; most head straight out to sea from points between Cape Ann (in Massachusetts) and Cape May, and fly all the way to Venezuela -- a journey of more than three days with no food, sleep or resting!

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – Barbara spotted a female working along the edge of a trail at Higbee's, but it took the rest of us until the very last morning to catch up. And catch up we did, with a very close view of a gorgeous male flitting through the hollies near the feeding station at CMBO's Northwood Center.

PALM WARBLER (*Setophaga palmarum*) – Seen nicely on several days, including a drab "Western" (subspecies *palmarum*) and a yellow "Eastern" (subspecies *hypochrysea*) sharing a bush at The Meadows. Their habit of constantly wagging their tails is distinctive.

PINE WARBLER (*Setophaga pinus*) – An adult male flitting through a big pine along the CMPSP's Yellow trail in the company of a load of Carolina Chickadees was behaving reasonably well (though not well enough that everybody had located him) until that Cooper's Hawk made a pass! Unfortunately, we never saw it again after that.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (*Setophaga coronata*) – Growing numbers of this late migrant appeared during the course of the week. Most were very drab young females. This is the brownest of the eastern warblers, though they always show a hint of yellow at their shoulders.

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*) – One high in a tree behind the CMBO's Northwood Center, where its yellow face gleamed among the leaves.

Passerellidae (New World Buntings and Sparrows)

SALTMARSH SPARROW (*Ammodramus caudacutus*) – One perched, half-hidden, in some taller *Spartina* grass at Shell Bay Landing -- super spotting, Barbara! Unfortunately, the lack of convenient landmarks made it a bit of a challenge for some of us to find, and it dropped down before everybody got a look.

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – A couple of distinctively dark birds flitted closer and closer through the *Spartina* grasses along one of the channels near Jarvis Sound on our back bay boat trip, never quite sitting out in the open. We had much better views of another at Shell Bay Landing, after tromping out into the saltmarsh -- so close that we could even see its yellow lore spot. It crept along the edge of a channel, calling and hitching itself up the taller grasses, with its tail cocked up like that of a very large wren.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – A big group foraged on the ground under some oak trees behind the Cape May Brewery, nibbling crab grass seeds and periodically chasing each other around.

FIELD SPARROW (*Spizella pusilla*) – A couple of very cooperative birds flitted along the edge of one of the dune crossovers at CMPSP, then flew to the top of a little bush for a bit of resting in the sunshine.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – A handsome adult foraged at the base of a bush at CMPSP, right below where a pair of Field Sparrows were perched.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – One scratched its way along the edge of the road at Higbee's, seen as we made our way back to the van after a visit to the Morning Flight platform on the final morning of the tour. This was the vanguard of the big numbers that will overwinter throughout southern New Jersey.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Easily the most common sparrow of the trip, with 6-8 bouncing along the causeway near the Lapland Longspur our first afternoon, a handful in the dunes at Stone Harbor Point, and dozens along the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Surprisingly, we found only a single bird -- one in the open in the dunes at Stone Harbor Point, allowing nice comparisons with some nearby Savannah Sparrows.

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*) – One lurking among the dead reeds at The Meadows proved a bit of a challenge to actually lay eyes on, though I think we all got there in the end; fortunately, it did seem to respond to squeaking! Some of the gang saw another sneaking through the reeds at the base of the Morning Flight platform on our last morning.

EASTERN TOWHEE (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) – We heard at least two calling from the dense undergrowth at Cox Hall Creek Wildlife Management Area on an otherwise quiet afternoon visit. [*]

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

SCARLET TANAGER (*Piranga olivacea*) – Two perched up in treetops near the Morning Flight platform at Higbee's on our final morning: first a very plain female (which I tried hard to make a female Summer Tanager), then a clear male, with jet-black wings standing out against his yellow body.

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Regular throughout, with many fine views of both males and females. A male at Higbee's one morning -- sitting on the red Pokeberry stems, eating purple Pokeberry berries -- was particularly eye-catching.

BLUE GROSBEAK (*Passerina caerulea*) – A couple of females/youngsters (or one of each) along the edge of the field at Hidden Valley showed very well when they perched up in a treetop -- eventually -- after first flitting furtively through the densest of weeds. The rufous wingbars, larger size and much larger bill help to separate them from the next species.

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – A male at eye level in a shrub right in front of the CMPSP hawkwatch platform played nice, sitting perched until everyone had had a chance to see him in the scope. We saw several others both male and female) at Higbee's and Hidden Valley, and heard their buzzy calls regularly in weedy fields throughout.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

BOBOLINK (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – A trio of high-flying birds flew over us at Higbee's, their distinctive "link link" calls raining down from the early morning sky.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE (*Icterus galbula*) – A female perched at the top of one of the big cherry trees along a field edge at Higbee's, giving us the chance to study her in the scope.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Common throughout, with many flocks of dozens or more winging southward most mornings, and big groups lifting briefly out of reed beds at Forsythe NWR, the Wetlands Institute and in the back bays around Cape May and swirling around a bit before dropping back in and disappearing.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – We spotted one huge group -- 100 birds or more -- feeding along the edge of the highway as we made our way out of the Philadelphia Airport. Their habit of holding their tails stiffly upturned can help to identify them, even at 50 mph! We saw a handful of others along the edge of the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR.

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Scattered birds most days of the tour, most of them in pretty serious tail molt. We saw a few gobbling seeds under the CMPSP hawkwatch platform, which allowed us to get good looks at the lovely purple iridescence in their plumage.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – Small numbers on many days, including a couple of sky-pointing males vying for dominance on a boat at Two Mile Landing and others from the Osprey on our back bay boat trip. This species is considerably larger than the last, with a sky-blue iridescence to their plumage.

Eringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – A handful of birds bounded over as we waited for the banders at The Meadows, but our best look came at Forsythe NWR, where we found a female perched up along the wildlife drive. [I]

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – Seen (and heard) on most days, including a few winter-drab birds in some holly trees along the CMPSP's Yellow trail.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Especially common around our hotel, including a few bouncing along the walkways as we went to and from our rooms most days. We had many others in the bushes out in front of the CMPSP hawkwatch platform. [I]

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – Small numbers on the lawns around our hotel (particularly on those early-morning departures) with others at Higbee's and Cox Hall Creek.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Abundant throughout, including an impressive number of apparently suicidal animals streaking across the road right in front of cars.

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – A few dark backs and fins rose and fell offshore of CMPSP one morning. Normally, these are abundant off the Cape May coast during the time of our tours, but they were decidedly scarce this year.

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Some of the gang spotted a couple along the road on our drive south from the airport the first afternoon, and we all saw another grazing at the edge of the Garden State Parkway on our way back from Forsythe NWR.

Herps

EASTERN RATSNAKE (*Pantherophis alleghaniensis*) – The snake we found crinkled along a trunk partway up a tree behind the CMBO's Northwood Center was most likely this species; Black Racers are far less likely to climb so high.

RED-EARED SLIDER (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) – Two in a pile in one of the back ponds at CMPSP -- one much larger than the other. This species is not native to NJ, but many were dumped in the state's waterways during the height of the "Teenaged Mutant Ninja Turtle" craze.

PAINTED TURTLE (*Chrysemys picta*) – A couple snoozed along the edge of a channel at The Meadows. Unlike the previous species, this one shows only yellow stripes on the head and neck.

NORTHERN RED-BELLIED TURTLE (*Pseudemys rubriventris*) – A group of these big dark turtles piled on a log in a pond near the entrance to Forsythe NWR, and another large specimen stomped along a sandy dike between two impoundments there, showing its red belly (and dark head and neck) nicely.

SOUTHERN GRAY TREEFROG (*Hyla chrysoscelis*) – After hearing this endangered species for several days around our CMPSP picnic shelter, we lucked into one clinging to the inner wall of the outhouse at The Meadows -- nice spotting Eric and Mary Kay! It appeared to be using a nickel-sized hole in the metal stabilizers holding the unit together as its hiding place.

NORTHERN GRAY TREEFROG (*Hyla versicolor*) – We heard one calling near the picnic area at Forsythe NWR. This and the previous species were formerly considered to be conspecific, but were split due to significant differences in vocalizations (plus some internal differences). [*]

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 143 bird taxa and 4 mammal taxa