



*Field Guides Tour Report*  
**SPRING IN CAPE MAY 2014**

May 18, 2014 to May 24, 2014  
Megan Edwards Crewe & Tom Johnson

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

Our first Spring in Cape May tour went off without a hitch, bringing watchers and quarry together in wonderfully birdy southern New Jersey. From shorelines heaving with flocks of shorebirds to woodlands echoing with the songs of breeding warblers, vireos and thrushes, we enjoyed a fine mix of habitats -- and a fine variety of birds as a result!

Among the highlights was the chance to get "up close and personal" with many species of shorebirds, which we saw again and again throughout the week. Mixed flocks of Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones, and Semipalmated Sandpipers thronged on the fringes of the Delaware Bayshore, gobbling up the tiny green horseshoe crab eggs scattered along the strandline. Peeps, including a quartet of long-winged White-rumped Sandpipers, pattered over the muddy edges of an impoundment at Heislerville WMA. Elegant American Oystercatchers stood tall on beach fronts, while tiny Piping Plovers mingled with their browner Semipalmated Plover cousins where the waves turned back from the sand. We even got to see a few species in the hand when we visited the shorebird banding station run by New Jersey Audubon.



*Among the treats on this tour is the chance to directly compare lots of species of shorebirds, over and over and over. (Photo by guide Megan Edwards Crewe)*

Warblers were another highlight; we found 23 species during the week (though two of those were "heard only"). Tops in the "Wow!" category were a super bright Prothonotary Warbler that preened on an open branch long enough for us all to get multiple scope views, a singing Hooded Warbler that gleamed among the greenery of Belleplain State Forest, a gorgeous male Blackburnian Warbler that foraged at eye level in some newly leafed out oaks, a Blue-winged Warbler that bathed in a nearby puddle, a point blank singing Ovenbird, and a Worm-eating Warbler that spent several minutes bashing a caterpillar to death on a branch. A Louisiana Waterthrush sashayed its way across a fallen log and up various tree branches. A Pine Warbler patrolled the base of a tree, gathering a mouthful of insects. Blackpoll Warblers threw back their heads and belted out their "shaking jingle bells" songs.

Then there were the Marsh Wrens that chortled from reed stems, and the Red-headed Woodpecker that sallied repeatedly after insects from the top of a telephone pole. And the noisy mob of Purple Martins that swirled around their multistory condominiums each morning. And the handsome drake Common Eider that floated among a big flock of mixed scoters (all three species!) near the Coral Avenue jetty. And the pair of Eastern Bluebirds that perched again and again on a nearby pole while hunting for tidbits for their nestlings. And cadres of graceful Black Skimmers tracing patterns on the water surface with their dragging bills. And who will soon forget the accommodating Acadian Flycatcher that sat and sang from branches almost within arm's reach?

Thanks so much for joining Tom and me for this first installment of the Spring in Cape May tour. We had a grand time. Hope to see you all in the field again soon! -- Megan

#### KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

#### BIRDS

##### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**BRANT (ATLANTIC)** (*Branta bernicla hrota*) – A handful of these winter visitors lingered in the back bays around Nummy Island.

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Abundant throughout, many with a gaggle of fluffy youngsters in tow. [N]

**MUTE SWAN** (*Cygnus olor*) – Unfortunately common south of the Cape May canal. This species is a real problem in the county, driving many native species off the ponds they claim. [N]

**WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) – A couple of fly by pairs seen in flight -- some in Tom's van spotted two birds flying along Sea Grove Avenue just before we stopped for the Cooper's Hawk nest, and some in both vans spotted a pair winging past in the upland wooded section of Forsythe NWR.

**GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*) – Two pairs preened on ponds at the Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge (better known locally as The Meadows). This species breeds in small numbers in Cape May county.

**AMERICAN BLACK DUCK** (*Anas rubripes*) – Best seen at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, where one in an impoundment close to the wildlife drive gave us great opportunity to study it up close. The purplish speculum was edged with black lines -- an important indication that it wasn't a hybrid, as they typically show some which in those lines. We saw others around the refuge, and a single bird (apparently paired with a Mallard) at The Meadows.

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Ubiquitous, seen daily, and all across the county -- including several females surrounded by swarms of ducklings. [N]

**COMMON EIDER (ATLANTIC)** (*Somateria mollissima dresseri*) – This one was certainly a surprise. An adult male in full, spectacular breeding plumage suddenly appeared among the scoter flock off Coral Avenue -- great spotting, Rick and Jerry!

**SURF SCOTER** (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – A young drake and several hens floated among the big scoter flock just off Coral Avenue. Most scoters are long gone from Cape May by the time of our tour.

**WHITE-WINGED SCOTER** (*Melanitta fusca*) – A single female floated in the surf off Avalon, appearing and disappearing from view as she bobbed on the waves, and we saw a couple of others among the big scoter flock just off Coral Avenue.

**BLACK SCOTER** (*Melanitta americana*) – Dozens and dozens floated in the surf off Coral Avenue, occasionally disappearing below the surface in search of mollusks.

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** (*Mergus serrator*) – A female floated on one of the impoundments at Forsythe NWR, lingering after most of her species had departed for points north.

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

**WILD TURKEY** (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – Scattered birds roamed through grassy fields east of Belleplain State Forest, occasionally gathering into small groups.

#### Gaviidae (Loons)

**COMMON LOON** (*Gavia immer*) – One flew over Belleplain SF and another flew over Heislerville WMA, both headed north. We saw a youngster, still sporting its drab winter plumage, in the Cape May Harbor at the start of our back bay boat trip.

#### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**RED-NECKED GREBE** (*Podiceps grisegena*) – One snoozing on Lake Champlain our last morning was the final new bird of the trip. Though it had begun to "color up", this bird probably won't be headed north this year, as it doesn't appear to be particularly well.

#### Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

**NORTHERN GANNET** (*Morus bassanus*) – A distant youngster, with almost no hint of white in its plumage, glided by high above the waves off Coral Avenue. Most gannets are gone from New Jersey waters by the time of our tour.

#### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Seen daily, with especially nice studies of many on nests in the rookery at Heislerville WMA and others drying their wings on marina posts in Cape May Harbor. [N]

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

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*) – Also daily, including some courting birds in the rookery at Heislerville WMA which looked rather like they'd exploded -- sprays of feathers in every direction! [N]

**SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*) – Also daily, often in convenient comparison with the previous species. [N]

**LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulea*) – Fine views of a neck-craning adult hunting in one of the ponds at The Meadows and of a speckled immature bird (blue feathers liberally sprinkled through its white plumage) in one of the puddles on Nummy Island.

**TRICOLORED HERON** (*Egretta tricolor*) – Two birds hunted in one of the ponds on Nummy Island, their blue bills glowing in the late afternoon light.

**CATTLE EGRET** (*Bubulcus ibis*) – A trio of birds rummaged on the grassy lawn of a senior center along Route 9, looking for tidbits.

**GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*) – Our best views came at Lake Champlain on our final morning, when we found a pair nest building in some willows on the far side. One carried a sizeable stick back and forth across the water, trying to get up enough courage to pass the noisy lawn mower. We saw others in flight over several area highways.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – An adult snoozed among the trees in a rookery at Avalon, and at least 100 (including some of last year's youngsters) snoozed on nests or stood on nearby branches in the rookery at Heislerville WMA.

**YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – We spotted a total of five on a little island in Avalon, including one handsome adult hunting in the Spartina grass just across the channel from where we stood.

#### Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

**GLOSSY IBIS** (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – At least 100 foraged on the Spartina grass flats at Forsythe NWR, their bronze and green feathers gleaming in the sun. We saw others at Cape May Point SP and Beaver Swamp.

#### Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*) – Small numbers circled in the skies over Cape May county, distinguished from the more abundant Turkey Vultures by their smaller size, shorter tails, flatter flight profile and pale primary patches.

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*) – Abundant and widespread, including a big kettle of 45 or so swirling high above Cape May Point SP one morning.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Daily, including many carrying fish. The number of pairs on nests around the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR was truly staggering. Tom estimated at least 25 birds; not bad, for a species that was in serious trouble only a generation ago! [N]

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**MISSISSIPPI KITE** (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) – Two with a kettle of vultures high above Cape May Point SP were a fine surprise. This is a regular vagrant to southern New Jersey in the spring, overshooting their more southerly breeding grounds.

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*) – A young male cruised past low over the marsh at Cape May Point SP on our first morning there, and a female coursed over the reedbeds at Forsythe NWR.

**COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*) – We saw little more than the long tail and (for some) turning head of the female as she sat on her stick nest high in a tree in Cape May Point SP one morning. [N]

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Our best views probably came at Beaver Swamp, where an adult sat perched on a dead snag across the lake from where we stood. We also saw an adult as it cruised past high above the forest at Belleplain SF, and a youngster as it soared over Heislerville WMA later the same day.

**BROAD-WINGED HAWK** (*Buteo platypterus*) – A dozen or so -- including two adults and a handful of youngsters in heavy wing molt -- circled among the vultures in a big kettle over Cape May Point SP our first morning.

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Those who drove down with us from Philadelphia spotted several along the highway on our way south, we had a trio of others with the circling vulture flock over Cape May Point SP our first morning and another in flight over Avalon while we enjoyed our first Yellow-crowned Night-Herons.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

**CLAPPER RAIL** (*Rallus longirostris*) – We heard them calling from the salt marshes on many days, and finally caught up with one at Two Mile Beach our last afternoon. It lurked at the edge of a grassy island for a while -- calling periodically -- before swimming across an open gap to another grass patch. Wonderful!

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

**AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER** (*Haematopus palliatus*) – Daily, including several pairs nesting on the Cape May beaches. We saw some in flight, where their flashy black and white wings are certainly eye-catching. [N]

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Common, including dozens on the mudflats of the back bays and Forsythe NWR, a handful in the shallow ponds on Nummy Island, and a scattering among the thousands of birds in the impoundment at Heislerville WMA. Many were already in fine breeding plumage.

**SEMPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Every day but the last, including some in nice comparison with the next species on the beach at Avalon.

**PIPING PLOVER** (*Charadrius melodus*) – We saw "Michelle Obama" and "Mr. Darcy", both carrying plenty of colorful "bling" in the form of multiple colored leg bands, which allow the researchers to identify them. Sadly, this species is in very serious trouble in southern New Jersey, with almost no chicks successfully fledged in the past few years.

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Regular around Cape May Point, including a trio noisy birds in flight (and foraging) at The Meadows.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularia*) – Scattered individuals teetered along pond edges at The Meadows, Forsythe NWR and along the back bays, seen from The Osprey on our boat trip. The stiff-winged flight of this species is distinctive.

**SOLITARY SANDPIPER** (*Tringa solitaria*) – A single bird strode along the edge of one of the back ponds at The Meadows; most of this species had long since departed to points north.

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Regular in small numbers, including a dozen or so sweeping the deeper waters of the big impoundment at Heislerville WMA.

**WILLET (EASTERN)** (*Tringa semipalmata semipalmata*) – Quite common around Cape May, with dozens rising on flashing wings to chase each other over the salt marsh, shouting their loud "Per Will Willet" calls.

**WILLET (WESTERN)** (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*) – One among the shorebirds at Heislerville WMA was a surprise; though they winter here, most western birds are long gone by the time of our tour. This subspecies is paler and longer legged than is the eastern subspecies.

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*) – Scattered individuals, including one conveniently close to a Greater Yellowlegs for easy comparison at The Meadows our first evening.

**WHIMBREL** (*Numenius phaeopus*) – Dozens lounged along the edges of the back bays, seen from The Osprey on our boat trip.

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*) – Good numbers of these handsome shorebirds scurried along the shore at Reed's Beach, and others did the same at Kimble's Beach later in the week. This is one of the species whose future depends on the availability of horseshoe crab eggs.

**RED KNOT** (*Calidris canutus*) – Fine studies of many of these big shorebirds along Reed's Beach, some from the vans and some from the jetty -- nearly making it worth running the "no-see-ums" gauntlet! This long distance migrant has recently been declared "threatened" by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

**STILT SANDPIPER** (*Calidris himantopus*) – One in partial breeding plumage fed among the many dowitchers at The Meadows.

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*) – Scores scurried along the beach at Avalon, chasing the waves. We had a great chance to compare this species and the surprisingly similar Semipalmated Sandpiper at Kimble's Beach towards the end of our tour.

**DUNLIN** (*Calidris alpina*) – Every day but the last, including some in fine breeding plumage. The former name for this species was Red-backed Sandpiper, and we could certainly see why!

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*) – Also seen nearly every day, with especially nice studies of those pattering on the mudflats at The Meadows. We had good side by side comparisons with Semipalmated Sandpipers at Heislerville WMA.

**WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER** (*Calidris fuscicollis*) – Four among the multitude of Semipalmated Sandpipers at Heislerville were a bit of a



"Where's Waldo" challenge; good thing there were lots of little islands of grass to use as markers! We had others at The Meadows and Forsythe NWR.

**SEMPALMATED SANDPIPER** (*Calidris pusilla*) – Hundreds -- make that THOUSANDS -- pattered over shores and mudflats all across the county, giving us multiple good opportunities to study them. We got some up close and personal looks at those David Mizrahi and his team were banding at Heislerville.

**SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus griseus*) – Very common, with scores demonstrating their "sewing machine" feeding methods in shallow ponds across the county.

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

**PARASITIC JAEGER** (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – Three -- two adults and an immature -- hunting in the rips off Coral Avenue were a late-season treat. We even got to watch the two adults tag teaming some unfortunate terns, chasing them until they dropped their fish.

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

**LAUGHING GULL** (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Abundant throughout. This is southern Jersey's most common gull, with tens of thousands breeding in the back bay salt marshes. The ones gobbling horseshoe crab eggs along the shore gave us particularly nice views.

**RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*) – A handful of youngsters -- last year's hatchlings -- rested in one of the impoundments at Heislerville WMA. This species overwinters in good numbers in New Jersey, but adults typically leave for their northern breeding grounds before the time of our tour.

**HERRING GULL** (*Larus argentatus*) – Daily, including lots of scruffy brown youngsters.

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus fuscus*) – Good thing Richard Crossley was still seawatching when we left Coral Avenue! We had just all piled into the vans when he texted to let us know one of these less common gulls had landed on the beach.

**GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus marinus*) – Very common throughout, including good flight views of several adults over the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron roost, and a gang of checkered youngsters on the beach at Coral Avenue.

**LEAST TERN** (*Sternula antillarum*) – Especially nice studies of these little terns at The Meadows, where they called and hunted over the main pools.

**GULL-BILLED TERN** (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – A pair hunted over the far end of the pond at Beaver Swamp, and another flew past at Forsythe NWR, close enough that we could clearly see its blunt dark bill.

**COMMON TERN** (*Sterna hirundo*) – Scattered birds in wetlands around the point, with particularly nice studies of one sitting on a railing beside the road at Two Mile Landing.

**FORSTER'S TERN** (*Sterna forsteri*) – Dozens on the railing at Cape May Point SP allowed close study, as did others hunting over the ponds at Forsythe NWR.

**BLACK SKIMMER** (*Rynchops niger*) – A mob of them loafed on a muddy islet in the middle of the impoundment at Heislerville WMA, allowing good scope studies. We saw others skimming at The Meadows and Forsythe NWR.

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

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) [I]

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Ken and Sally spotted one on telephone wires near the hotel one morning, shortly before we left for breakfast.

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*) – Widespread across the county, including multiple courting pairs at the state park and plenty sitting on wires along the highways and byways.

#### *Cuculidae (Cuckoos)*

**YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus americanus*) – Several along the boardwalk trail at Cape May Point SP sat long enough for us to study them in the scope. We saw -- and heard -- others at Belleplain SF. This is a common breeding species in southern New Jersey.

**BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*) – Two in Cape May Point SP on our first morning were a nice surprise; this species is relatively uncommon here in the spring. We saw both shortly after seeing the previous species, which helped us to note the differences. Its red eye ring was particularly noticeable.

#### *Strigidae (Owls)*

**EASTERN SCREECH-OWL** (*Megascops asio*) – We heard one call (and call and call) from a darkened forest near the canal one night, but just couldn't find it. [\*]

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

**CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW** (*Antrostomus carolinensis*) – This species was also quite vocal one night near the canal, but never showed itself. [\*]

#### *Apodidae (Swifts)*

**CHIMNEY SWIFT** (*Chaetura pelagica*) – Daily, often in nice comparison with the area's omnipresent swallows.

#### *Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)*

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus colubris*) – Our best views -- by far -- came at Belleplain SF, where one little female attended her nest (a spiderweb cup festooned with lichens) just above our picnic table. She was particularly anxious about the Gray Catbird that was attracted to our lunch! We saw others at Belleplain SP and CMBO-Goshen.

#### *Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – A single bird sat atop a small dead snag at Forsythe NWR, a long way out from the wildlife drive. This species is relatively uncommon in south Jersey during the summer, due to a lack of nesting places.

#### *Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**RED-HEADED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) – One flycatching from the top of a telephone pole was a treat one afternoon in the north of the county. This species is in serious decline over much of its range, due to habitat loss.

**RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – Most of the group saw one at Heislerville WMA, its distinctive white primary patches

flashing as it bounded past. We heard others at Cape May Point SP and Belleplain SF.

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides pubescens*) – Our best views came at Beaver Swamp WMA, where a little female hitched her way up several dead snags near the parking area. Most saw a male briefly at Cape May Point SP, and we heard another in Belleplain SF.

**NORTHERN FLICKER** (*Colaptes auratus*) – We heard one calling at Beaver Swamp WMA (just before we spotted the Downy Woodpecker) and Cass spotted one at Belleplain SF, while waiting in the van as we birded.

#### Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – A pair perched on a high rise balcony railing in one of the barrier island communities was a treat -- as were the fluffy little heads (at least two chicks) Jean spotted poking up from a bowl on the same balcony.

#### Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

**EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE** (*Contopus virens*) – Several heard (and a few seen) each time we visited Belleplain SF, including one that came right down to the ground, hunting along the roadside.

**ACADIAN FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax virens*) – Fabulous studies of a very close bird in the campground at Belleplain SF; it called and flicked through nearby trees as it hunted, giving us plenty of time to study its broad-based bill and subtle plumage characteristics.

**WILLOW FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax traillii*) – One along the edge of the first field at Higbee Beach WMA was a nice find on our last morning.

**EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*) – Seen very well at Belleplain SF, where a pair were nesting under one of the bridges. [N]

**GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus crinitus*) – Common at Belleplain SF, where their loud "reep" call was a regular part of the tour soundtrack. We had especially nice views of a couple of low birds along one of the power line cuts there.

**EASTERN KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) – Regular throughout, including some hunting from weed stalks in Cape May Point SP and several flying past the dune crossover at Coral Avenue, presumably just arriving into New Jersey.

#### Vireonidae (Vireos)

**WHITE-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo griseus*) – Great studies of one singing in the wet woods at Belleplain SF, with others heard at Beaver Swamp WMA. Their song typically starts and ends with a loud "chick".

**YELLOW-THROATED VIREO** (*Vireo flavifrons*) – We heard the burry song of this species echoing from the wet woods near one of the bridges in Belleplain SF, not far from where we spotted our Worm-eating Warbler. [\*]

**RED-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo olivaceus*) – Though we heard dozens of these singing from leafy canopies all across the wooded parts of the county, we only laid eyes on a few at Belleplain SF, including one that descended to some eye level branches to search for tasty tidbits.

#### Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

**BLUE JAY** (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Common, including a little group flying together up Lighthouse Drive one day, and one quietly searching along the boardwalk (for nests?) in Cape May Point SP one morning.

**AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Less common than the previous species, only seen for sure on a couple of days. This species has the classic "caw" call we all know and love.

**FISH CROW** (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Very common along the coast, including several scouting for shorebird and tern nest along the beach at The Meadows, and others over Forsythe NWR. The nasal "car" of this species was regularly heard.

#### Alaudidae (Larks)

**HORNED LARK** (*Eremophila alpestris*) – Fine views of several at the Cape May airport, where some were scurrying along the runways and others were singing from the directional signs.

#### Hirundinidae (Swallows)

**NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Small numbers on several days, including one coursing over the beach at Coral Avenue, conveniently close to nearby Tree Swallows for direct comparison.

**PURPLE MARTIN** (*Progne subis*) – Daily, with those in the martin houses at Cape May Point SP providing particularly nice chance for up close studies -- particularly when Dave Thomas (the fellow in charge of the colony) lowered their boxes to clean out the sparrow nests.

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Also daily, with especially nice views of a pair around one of the nest boxes along a trail at Cape May Point SP and others over the ponds at The Meadows.

**BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*) – A couple of birds winging low over Bunker Pond at Cape May Point SP showed their diagnostic brown chest bands. We saw others over the Phragmites stands at Forsythe NWR.

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – Abundant all across the county.

**CLIFF SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – One zoomed past behind us at Coral Avenue, seen by those who spun around fast enough when Tom spotted it. Its pale rump patch as it disappeared over the trees was distinctive.

#### Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

**CAROLINA CHICKADEE** (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Regular throughout, with especially nice views of a pair feeding low in some small pines along the trail at Cape May Point SP. As usual, we heard even more than we saw -- a cheery four note song.

**TUFTED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – Also regular, though not as easy to spot as the chickadees. Our best views came at the power line cut where we found our Red-headed Woodpecker, when we found one feeding quietly right over the road.

#### Sittidae (Nuthatches)

**WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta carolinensis*) – One hacked at some hidden food item atop a thick branch at Belleplain, seen by some of the group while the rest enjoyed our male Scarlet Tanager. We heard another calling by the visitor's center there.

#### Troglodytidae (Wrens)

**HOUSE WREN** (*Troglodytes aedon*) – As usual, this species was far more regularly heard than seen (that wonderfully bubbling soup of notes), but most of the group got at least a glimpse of one or more of these plain-faced wrens at Cape May Point SP.

**MARSH WREN** (*Cistothorus palustris*) – Fabulous views of a singing bird perched atop a reed right beside the road into Reed's Beach, another

skulking along the edge of the road at Heislerville WMA, and more along the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR.

**CAROLINA WREN** (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – The loud song of this species was a regular part of the tour soundtrack, and we had fine views of several -- including a singing bird Rick spotted for us on our long walk around Cape May Point SP on our first morning. We could even see the (normally hidden) white spots on its back!

#### *Poliptilidae (Gnatcatchers)*

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Poliptila caerulea*) – Our best views came at Belleplain SF, where we found multiple birds twitching through the oak trees, looking rather like tiny Northern Mockingbirds. Their weak, scratchy songs were a regular part of the tour soundtrack there.

#### *Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia sialis*) – A pair feeding nestlings a box near our vans put on a great show at the Belleplain visitor's center one morning, particularly the male, who returned again and again to the same nearby post.

**WOOD THRUSH** (*Hylocichla mustelina*) – Lovely views of this spotty thrush in the campground at Belleplain SF; its mellow fluting song was regular backdrop to the other sounds in much of the park.

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) – Regular, including dozens trotting around on the grassy circle in the middle of the entrance drive at Cape May Point SP.

#### *Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)*

**GRAY CATBIRD** (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Found pretty much everywhere we went, including several squeaking from bushes along the red trail at Cape May Point SP.

**BROWN THRASHER** (*Toxostoma rufum*) – Single birds on several days, including one scurrying across a grassy campsite at Belleplain SF, and another rummaging under a picnic table near the lake there.

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Regular throughout the county, including one singing from the hedgerow near the parking lot at The Meadows our first afternoon.

#### *Sturnidae (Starlings)*

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Abundant, with many ferrying mouthfuls of food to unseen nestlings. [IN]

#### *Bombycillidae (Waxwings)*

**CEDAR WAXWING** (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Seen in flight on several days, with our best looks coming at a little group perched in a tree near the parking lot at Higbee Beach WMA our last morning.

#### *Parulidae (New World Warblers)*

**OVENBIRD** (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – We heard far more of these forest warblers than we saw, but had fine studies of one in the campground at Belleplain SF. It sat for long minutes on a branch, belting out its loud song and showing us first one side, then the other.

**WORM-EATING WARBLER** (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) – One beating a worm to death on a branch at Belleplain SF showed wonderfully well, giving us long scope studies. We had great opportunity to compare its song to the similar songs of Chipping Sparrows and Pine Warblers there.

**LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia motacilla*) – One along a slow-flowing river in Belleplain SF sang and sang for a long time before finally wagging its way across a branch upstream. After a few more minutes, it came winging our way along the creek -- then spotted us and flashed up to an open branch to check us out.

**NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – We heard one chipping from the undergrowth around Lake Lily one morning, but never spotted the bird itself. [\*]

**BLUE-WINGED WARBLER** (*Vermivora cyanoptera*) – Wow! One bathing in a roadside puddle at Belleplain SF was a treat, allowing us to watch quietly from mere yards away. And it saved us a walk out that tick-infested path!

**BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** (*Mniotilta varia*) – Especially nice studies of a young male singing from a stubby little snag low in a tree at Belleplain SF. We saw a female creeping up a tree at Cape May Point SP on our long walk there.

**PROTHONOTARY WARBLER** (*Protonotaria citrea*) – A lovely male sat for long minutes in a tree right near the path at Beaver Swamp WMA, allowing fine scope studies. Its folk name is the very apt "Swamp Candle".

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Seen and/or heard every day of the tour, including several singing males perched up on reed stems at Forsythe NWR.

**HOODED WARBLER** (*Setophaga citrina*) – A handsome male glowed among the leaves at Belleplain SF, flicking from spot to spot as he sang.

**AMERICAN REDSTART** (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Small numbers on several days, including a female (or young male) flicking through trees at Cape May Point SP one morning, and a black and orange adult male flashing along a roadside at Belleplain SF.

**NORTHERN PARULA** (*Setophaga americana*) – One foraged in a tree beside the road, just across the road from where we parked to check out the Cooper's Hawk nest.

**MAGNOLIA WARBLER** (*Setophaga magnolia*) – At least one male bounced through one of the groves at Cape May Point SP, part of the same mixed flock that contained our Blackburnian Warbler.

**BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER** (*Setophaga fusca*) – A gorgeous male flicked through the growing leaves in one of the groves at Cape May Point SP, foraging right at eye level -- which was a real treat, given that this species is often at the very top of tall trees.

**YELLOW WARBLER** (*Setophaga petechia*) – Our best views came at Two Mile Landing, where a male foraged only a foot off the ground in a tiny bush right beside the road.

**CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER** (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) – A young male flicked through an oak right beside the trail at Beaver Swamp WMA, shortly before we spotted our Prothonotary Warbler.

**BLACKPOLL WARBLER** (*Setophaga striata*) – Recorded nearly every day. We heard the soft "jingle bell" song of this species most days and had super views of several sharp-dressed males (and briefer views of one drabber female) at Cape May Point SP.

**PINE WARBLER** (*Setophaga pinus*) – Fabulous views of a male hopping around the base of a nearby tree carrying a mouthful of insects; there were babies somewhere nearby! [N]

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER** (*Setophaga coronata*) – Here's one we forgot to write in. We had several with the mixed warbler flock we found on our stroll through Cape May Point SP our first day.

**YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER** (*Setophaga dominica*) – Spectacular views of an often tough warbler (they are, after all, most often found at the TOP of tall trees) near the visitor's center at Belleplain SF, where Tom spotted one singing and preening not far from our picnic breakfast spot. It sat in the same spot for at least 5 minutes, allowing long, leisurely scope studies.

**PRAIRIE WARBLER** (*Setophaga discolor*) – We heard one singing at Beaver Swamp (a distinctive rising song), and most in the group spotted a male feeding along the edge of the first field at Higbee Beach WMA, where they breed.

**CANADA WARBLER** (*Cardellina canadensis*) – We heard one singing from the undergrowth at Higbee's Beach WMA on our last morning, and a few may have gotten a brief glimpse at its black-streaked yellow belly as it flashed past while moving from one hidden perch to another.

**WILSON'S WARBLER** (*Cardellina pusilla*) – A handsome male cavorted through bushes at the edge of the parking lot in Cape May Point State Park. This species is a regular vagrant in Cape May during migration, with a handful of birds appearing somewhere in the county every spring.

**YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT** (*Icteria virens*) – One chortled from a tree top at Cape May Point SP, his yellow belly gleaming.

#### Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

**EASTERN TOWHEE** (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) – We heard one singing its distinctive "drink your tea" song from the undergrowth in Belleplain SF on each of our visits. [✱]

**CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*) – Quite common in Belleplain SF, with especially nice looks at several foraging on a grassy lawn near Nummy Lake.

**FIELD SPARROW** (*Spizella pusilla*) – Best seen at Higbee Beach WMA on our final morning, where we found a little family group foraging in the middle of the track and perching up in weedy vegetation along the field edges. We saw another briefly at The Meadows on our second visit there.

**SALTmarsh SPARROW** (*Ammodramus caudacutus*) – Unfortunately, these little sparrows proved characteristically reticent, perching only briefly atop the Spartina grass at Forsythe NWR to sing a phrase or two before dropping back down into cover.

**SEASIDE SPARROW** (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – Seen well at Forsythe NWR, where we spotted a dozen or more singing from reed stems. Though they differed somewhat in overall coloration, they were all relatively dark, with distinctively pale throats. We saw others at Shell Bay and along Ocean Drive.

**SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*) – Easily the most common and widespread sparrow of the tour, seen well on most days -- including several singing from perches atop bushes on the dunes at The Meadows and Cape May Point SP.

#### Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

**SUMMER TANAGER** (*Piranga rubra*) – A nicely red young male singing from big trees edging a clearing in the Belleplain SF campground still showed olive wings. We also saw what might have been the tatty start of its nest in a tree over the road.

**SCARLET TANAGER** (*Piranga olivacea*) – A fantastically bright male sang from the treetops in the Belleplain SF campground; it's amazing how difficult it can be to find a bright red bird among the leaves, but we got there in the end!

**NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – This bright red species, on the other hand, showed well on most days, often singing from treetops around our picnic shelter at Cape May Point SP.

**BLUE GROSBEAK** (*Passerina caerulea*) – A male, perched up and singing atop a big tree along the Cape May Point SP boardwalk trail was a popular hit on both our first and last full days.

**INDIGO BUNTING** (*Passerina cyanea*) – Small numbers on several days, including a male singing from a treetop beside an abandoned barn near Tarkiln Pond, and a female nibbling grass seeds in one of the fields at Higbee Beach WMA.

#### Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

**BOBOLINK** (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – A bounding flock of five flew in off the Delaware Bay and circled around the dune overlook at Coral Avenue before heading off inland. This species has declined precipitously in New Jersey.

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Common and widespread, with scores singing and battling in marshes all across the county.

**COMMON GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Ubiquitous, found throughout the county in nearly every habitat.

**BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus major*) – Less common than the previous species, primarily because they're largely restricted to the coast. Those at Forsythe NWR proved to be especially confiding, with numbers sitting on signs and posts along the wildlife drive.

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*) – Common throughout the county, including multiple leks of males "singing" in treetops at Cape May Point SP and lots of females trundling along the roadsides in the heart of the forest at Belleplain. Sadly, all those road cuts make it easy for cowbirds to penetrate deep into the more pristine parts of the park.

**ORCHARD ORIOLE** (*Icterus spurius*) – Recorded most days, including an adult male that chortled from a juniper near the parking lot at The Meadows our first afternoon, and a youngster that did the same in several trees along the edge of the first field at Higbee Beach WMA.

#### Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – A pair near the hawk watch platform at Cape May Point SP each morning was very cooperative, allowing long views; presumably, they had a nest nearby, as the male spent much time singing from the railings.

**AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus tristis*) – Small numbers on most days, including a little gang bouncing over the plover ponds at Cape May Point SP, and a bright male perched up near the Belleplain SF visitor's center.

#### Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Very common, including the industrious gang ferrying mouthfuls of grass back to the Purple Martin houses each morning, rebuilding the nests that Dave kept removing. [N]

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## MAMMALS

**EASTERN COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – Daily, including one that sat frozen beside the trail through The Meadows our first afternoon, counting on its camouflage.

**EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Common throughout, including one near our picnic spot at Forsythe NWR.



**MUSKRAT** (*Ondatra zibethica*) – One paddled across the ponds at The Meadows on each of our visits.

**BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN** (*Tursiops truncatus*) – We saw the backs and fins of a good-sized pod feeding just offshore at Coral Avenue, with others seen from Cape May Point SP. This is a summer visitor to NJ, retreating south during colder weather.

**STRIPED SKUNK** (*Mephitis mephitis*) – One trundled across the street and up a driveway while we watched from our (safe) vantage point near the Cooper's Hawk nest. We saw a second in Cape May Point SP later the same morning. Many of the skunks on Cape May Point are largely white.

**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – A herd of them bounded away through a field just outside Belleplain SF on our first visit there.

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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**Totals for the tour: 160 bird taxa and 6 mammal taxa**