



Field Guides Tour Report
Cape May Megan's Way II 2015

Oct 4, 2015 to Oct 10, 2015
Megan Edwards Crewe

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



Cape May Warbler is a coveted species for a Cape May tour; after all, it's the location that gave the bird its name! Photo by participant Peter Hart.

A week before this trip began, it was looking a bit unlikely it was even going to happen; a hurricane was bearing down on the east coast, and it appeared to be headed straight towards New Jersey! Fortunately, that didn't happen. The hurricane headed out to sea, and our tour proceeded as scheduled, with some fine migration weather to boot. Fall in Cape May is all about cold fronts from the northwest -- the bigger, the better!

Our tour started with a bang our very first morning, when masses of birds arrived in the wake of one of those cold fronts. That first breakfast was a bit delayed, as we bailed out of the van en route to witness the spectacle: waves of Gray Catbirds (hundreds? thousands?) flowed across the road, flycatchers hunted from wires and tree tops, warblers and kinglets flickered through trees in every direction and, overhead, the omnipresent accipiters kept an eye out for an easy meal. The steady parade of birds that morning was definitely a highlight of the tour, but it was far from the only highlight. We had another smaller pulse of birds with a weaker cold front later in the week, plus enjoyed almost daily encounters with massive flocks of Tree Swallows, which swirled over Cape May Point like flakes in a snow globe.

Smaller moments also left indelible impressions. A single Piping Plover pattered on the strand at Stone Harbor Point. A statuesque Hudsonian Godwit chased crickets on an island, while a drake Eurasian Wigeon floated on the pond behind it. Both adult and immature Bald Eagles soared overhead. Saltmarsh and Seaside sparrows perched nearly side by side among the grasses in Wildwood's back bays, nibbling on seed heads and allowing us to leisurely study their differences. A Clapper Rail stood on the edge of a channel and belted out his song. A mixed mob of Indigo Buntings and sparrows (White-throated, Song, Swamp, Chipping, Savanna, and an unexpected Clay-colored) bounced through the flower beds at the Stone Harbor Bird Sanctuary, providing an impromptu "sparrow master class." A Marsh Wren perched in the open, eyeing us as it considered its next move. A third-year Lesser Black-backed Gull mingled with its Great Black-backed cousins on a windy beach. Our 14 species of warblers included several stunning male Black-throated Blues (some feeding right on the ground near the Cape May Bird Observatory's Northwood Center), a trio of Prairie Warblers and a couple of Black-throated Greens in some junipers by our regular picnic lunch shelter, lots of tail-wagging Palm Warblers, and plenty of Blackpoll Warblers -- a species with a seemingly insane, 3-day transoceanic migration straight from NJ to South America!

Thanks so much for joining me for some time in my "backyard". It was great fun sharing Cape May's birds, and a few of its restaurants, and a taste of its migration magic with you! I hope to see you all in the field again somewhere, some day -- who knows, maybe on a SPRING in Cape May trip!

-- Megan

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

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

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

- SNOW GOOSE** (*Chen caerulescens*) – One flying with a big flock of Canada Geese at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR was a bit of a surprise -- nice spotting, Glen! This species overwinters in huge numbers in southern New Jersey, but most have not yet arrived by the time of our tours.
- BRANT** (*Branta bernicla*) – A single bird floated along one of the jetties sheltering Cape May harbor, seen from our back bay boat, The Osprey. Tens of thousands of these geese overwinter in the back bays of southern New Jersey.
- CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Common and widespread all across southern New Jersey. Most are here year-round now, with true migrants making up less and less of the population each year.
- MUTE SWAN** (*Cygnus olor*) – Unfortunately very common, particularly on CMPSP's Bunker Pond, where scores floated majestically. This alien species is causing big problems in southern New Jersey, displacing local wildfowl off nesting ponds and fowling waterways -- far too many big birds pooping year round! [I]
- GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*) – A pair floated on the back side of Bunker Pond one morning, mingling with the more common teal and Mallards -- good spotting, Glen! Small numbers of this species breed in southern New Jersey.
- EURASIAN WIGEON** (*Anas penelope*) – A drake floated among a big raft of ducks at The Nature Conservancy's "Meadows" property, making a nice backdrop for our Hudsonian Godwit. Small numbers of this Old World species have overwintered in southern New Jersey for the past few years.
- AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*) – Common on the ponds of Cape May Point State Park (CMPSP) and the Meadows, including some providing fine comparison to the previous species. Most of the males were just starting to come out of their eclipse plumage.
- AMERICAN BLACK DUCK** (*Anas rubripes*) – Abundant at Forsythe NWR, where they floated in big mixed rafts with Mallards. A few showed their black-edged purple speculums nicely as they preened. We saw a couple of hybrids at CMPSP; their white-edged speculums showed they had some Mallard genes.
- MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Abundant throughout, including dozens on the ponds of CMPSP and The Meadows, and in the impoundments at Forsythe NWR.
- BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas discors*) – Reasonably common throughout, particularly at CMPSP, where we saw some in close comparison with smaller Green-winged Teal. A few of the males were starting to show signs of the distinctive crescent moon mark they get on their faces in breeding plumage.
- NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*) – Another common species, particularly on CMPSP's Bunker Pond and at Forsythe NWR. The yellow eye of the male makes them easy to tell apart from the females, even when they're in eclipse plumage.
- NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*) – Plentiful at Forsythe NWR, where they winter in their thousands. Some of the males were already looking pretty dapper!
- GREEN-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas crecca*) – Especially nice looks at several groups at CMPSP and the Meadows; most of them were still in nonbreeding plumage -- though we certainly saw flashes of those distinctive green speculums as they preened.
- SURF SCOTER** (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – Our first were four flying past far out towards the horizon at Coral Avenue. Fortunately, we had much better views of other fly-bys at the Avalon seawatch -- close enough we could clearly see the distinctive white patches on the males' heads.
- BLACK SCOTER** (*Melanitta americana*) – Plenty of these winter visitors were already arriving at the Point, including a male we saw floating just offshore at CMPSP and a small group we saw near the jetties at the Coral Avenue dune crossover.
- RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – A few floated (sleeping) on Bunker Pond, their distinctively stiff tails pointing skyward.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

- WILD TURKEY** (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – A couple stalked down a Cape May driveway early one morning, checking the ground carefully for tidbits.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

- DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Hundreds and hundreds, in long, straggling lines overhead nearly everywhere we went along the coast, with closer looks at some perched on poles and docks in Cape May harbor's marinas during our boat trip.
- GREAT CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – One flew past as we watched the sea from a dune crossover at CMPSP, showing the white chin and unkinked neck that helps to distinguish it from the previous species. It's also larger, but that's hard to tell when it's alone!

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

- GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) – Regular throughout, including one hunting at the far end of Bunker Pond on our first morning, and more than a dozen scattered across the salt marshes at Forsythe NWR.
- GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*) – Another common species in wetlands throughout, including good numbers at Forsythe NWR.
- SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*) – Another common and widespread species, seen on most days -- including a couple on CMPSP's Bunker Pond our first morning, and dozens at Forsythe NWR.
- LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulea*) – A youngster along the back edge of Bunker Pond initially blended well with the Snowy Egrets there.
- TRICOLORED HERON** (*Egretta tricolor*) – A couple of individuals in the back bay salt marshes, seen from our boat.
- GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*) – One flew over us as we birded along Sea Grove Avenue on our first incredibly birdy morning.
- BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A youngster stood sentinel on a concrete spillway at Forsythe NWR, and others roosted in some scrubby bushes there and along the edges of the back bay in Avalon. We saw a sprinkling of others from The Osprey, half hidden in the *Spartina* grasses of the back bays.
- YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – A few from The Osprey (including one standing in a tree just above someone's raised deck along the Cape May Canal), with others at The Meadows.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

- BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*) – Seen most days, though in far smaller numbers than the next species.
- TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*) – Daily, including large numbers milling back and forth over Cape May Point most days -- heading to the very tip of land, and then retreating back up the peninsula again.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

- OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Regular throughout, typically in flight -- including as many as four at once in the air over Bunker Pond. More than a

few of the birds we saw were carrying snacks for later!

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

- NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*) – Seen on all but our first day. Most were youngsters, distinguished by their rusty underparts, and some -- including the one that flew past as we started our journey around the wildlife drive at Forsythe NWR -- were thrillingly close.
- SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*) – Every day but our first afternoon, often in good numbers. Particularly nice were those circling in the same thermals as the next species -- which allowed us to compare them over and over again.
- COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Scores of these flap-flap-glided their way across the skies throughout the tour -- but particularly at the southern end of the county, where we had close views of some over the hawkwatch at the state park.
- BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Satisfyingly common in the skies over Cape May and Forsythe NWR, including a trio of adults -- the local pair chasing a passing migrant -- over CMPSP, and a brown youngster over the Meadows.
- BROAD-WINGED HAWK** (*Buteo platypterus*) – Small numbers on a few of the days, including a single bird soaring low over the pine grove at CMPSP our first morning, and a trio circling with the vultures over the Meadows later in the week.
- RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Surprisingly few of this normally common raptor during the week. Our best views came at the Meadows (where a couple soared over with the vulture flock) and on the Osprey boat trip (where we saw a few perched in trees near the harbor mouth).

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

- CLAPPER RAIL (ATLANTIC COAST)** (*Rallus crepitans crepitans*) – This was the last new bird of the trip -- a bold bird that called from the reeds along Two Mile Landing road, then stepped out into the open on a muddy spot along the bank. Super!
- SORA** (*Porzana carolina*) – Diane was the lucky one who happened to be in the right place when one crept through a gap in the reeds at the Meadows. Unfortunately, it quickly snuck away, and none of the rest of us ever laid eyes on it.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

- AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER** (*Haematopus palliatus*) – A number of these big, handsome shorebirds gathered on a Cape May harbor jetty, allowing close approach -- and study -- from our boat.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

- BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Fairly common along the edges of the impoundments at Forsythe NWR, with others pattering on the marshy ponds visible from the Osprey on our boat trip, and along the strand at Stone Harbor Point. Most had lost the distinctive black bellies of their breeding plumage, but a few still showed hints of their former finery.
- SEMIPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – A few, looking chunky, mingled with the peeps along the edges of some of the impoundments at Forsythe NWR, and others foraged in saltmarsh puddles in Wildwood's back bays, seen from our boat.
- PIPING PLOVER** (*Charadrius melodus*) – One of these little plovers pattered along the edge of the sea at Stone Harbor Point, mingling with the Sanderlings there. This species is in steep decline along the east coast; all of Cape May county's nests failed this year.
- KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*) – A trio rested in CMPSP's parking lot one morning as we arrived for our picnic breakfast, allowing nice scope views.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

- SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*) – A few teetered along channel edges at Forsythe NWR, or fluttered along on stiff wings.
- SOLITARY SANDPIPER** (*Tringa solitaria*) – One flew past at the Meadows, seen as we waited for the Hudsonian Godwit to make an appearance. The black underwing of this species is distinctive.
- GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – The most widespread of the tour's shorebirds, with especially nice studies of numbers snoozing and preening among the Willets at the Wetlands Institute.
- WILLET** (*Tringa semipalmata*) – Dozens rested on a pond at the Wetlands Institute. All were of the western subspecies (*inornata*) which is larger, longer-legged, and paler than the eastern form.
- HUDSONIAN GODWIT** (*Limosa haemastica*) – This one was a surprise! The local text alert system had notified us of its presence, but it had wandered around to the back side of an island at the Meadows before we arrived. Fortunately, it eventually wandered out again, and proceeded to chase cricket after cricket back and forth along the shoreline. Great scope studies ensued!
- RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*) – A confiding group on the docks of one of the marinas in Cape May harbor was eminently approachable, allowing our boat to approach nearly within touching distance! We saw others on the beach at Stone Harbor Point.
- SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*) – Scores pattered along the tide line at Stone Harbor Point, and we saw a handful of others on the Coast Guard beaches during our back bay boat trip. This species overwinters by the thousands in Cape May county.
- DUNLIN** (*Calidris alpina*) – Another species which overwinters in significant numbers in Cape May county, though we saw only a few on our back bay boat trip.
- LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*) – Reasonably common along the muddy edges of channels and impoundments at Forsythe NWR, with a handful of others pattering around the soggy edge of the saltmarsh near the parking lot at the Wetlands Institute.
- SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER** (*Calidris pusilla*) – Reasonably common at Forsythe NWR, where dozens poked and prodded along the edges of the impoundments, with others on some of the marshy pools visible from our back bay boat.
- WESTERN SANDPIPER** (*Calidris mauri*) – A handful, showing their distinctive rusty scapulars and longer bills, foraged among the previous species on one of the ponds at Forsythe NWR.
- SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus griseus*) – Numbers, looking plump among the peeps, foraged along the edge of one of the big impoundments at Forsythe NWR, and others snoozed among the Willets at the Wetlands Institute.
- LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – A couple of youngsters mingled with the previous species at Forsythe NWR, giving us opportunity to practice our id skills -- find the grapefruit!
- WILSON'S SNIBE** (*Gallinago delicata*) – One poked its way along the edge of an island at the Meadows, keeping us entertained while we waited for the Hudsonian Godwit to make a reappearance.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

- PARASITIC JAEGER** (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – A dark bird powered low over the waves off CMPSP on our final morning, then went into a twisting, agile pursuit of a fish-encumbered tern.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

- LAUGHING GULL** (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Abundant throughout, including lots of youngsters lounging on the beaches and bathing in the fresh waters of Bunker Pond. The local south Jersey colony (largest Laughing Gull colony in the world) had a very productive breeding season this year.
- RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*) – A scattering at Forsythe NWR, with others standing on the beach at the Coral Avenue dune crossover. This is the local "winter parking lot gull".
- HERRING GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – Abundant throughout, in just about every possible plumage -- including lots of chocolate brown youngsters.
- LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus fuscus*) – A third-year bird with a mixed flock of gulls at the Coral Avenue dune crossover allowed good comparison with its neighbors. The longer wings and slimmer build of this species was easy to see -- as was the fact its back was paler than that of the nearby Great Black-backed Gulls.
- GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus marinus*) – Another abundant species, scattered on beaches or flying over all across the county (and beyond). The huge size and dark back of this species makes it easy to identify.
- CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – A couple hunted over Bunker Pond our first morning, but our best views came at the Avalon seawatch, where several patrolled back and forth along the nearby jetty.
- COMMON TERN** (*Sterna hirundo*) – One on the pilings of a marina along the edge of Cape May harbor allowed good comparison with neighboring Forster's Terns. Most have departed south by the time of our tours.
- FORSTER'S TERN** (*Sterna forsteri*) – A definite dropoff in numbers from the first tour (with many having shipped out once the weather cleared), but still quite common around Cape May harbor and the back bays, with others at Forsythe NWR and a few along Sunset Beach. The black eye patches that this species sports in winter plumage are distinctive.
- ROYAL TERN** (*Thalasseus maximus*) – Regular along the coast, typically hunting along the shoreline, or resting on the beaches.
- BLACK SKIMMER** (*Rynchops niger*) – We saw some along the beach near our hotel the first full day of the tour, but our best sightings came at Forsythe NWR, where hunting birds quartered back and forth along a roadside channel.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

- ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Daily, including dozens swirling around various overpass bridges on our drive down from the airport, and plenty around our hotel in Cape May. [I]
- MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaidura macroura*) – Abundant throughout, typically sitting on wires along the roads.

Apodidae (Swifts)

- CHIMNEY SWIFT** (*Chaetura pelagica*) – A handful winnowed over one of the fields at Higbee's one morning, distinctively stiff-winged compared to the swallows they were flying with.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

- BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Two chased each other around Lake Lily as we visited CMBO's Northwood Center one day (rattling noisily as they flew), and we saw others on posts at the Wetlands Institute and CMPSP.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

- RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – One of Cape May's more common woodpeckers, quickly distinguished in flight by the round white patches in their wings. We saw a few at Higbee's, and others at Cox Hall Creek and at the feeders outside CMBO's Northwood Center.
- YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – One fed on the trunk of a big Siberian Elm tree in front of CMBO's Northwood Center. The bold white slash on the wing of the sapsuckers is distinctive.
- DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides pubescens*) – Missed only on our first afternoon -- and that was because we only went to the beach! We had especially nice views of one hitching up several of the trees near the staff parking spots at the Northwood Center.
- HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides villosus*) – After hearing them on several days, we finally laid eyes on one near the intersection of two paths at Higbee's. This is far less common than the previous species in Cape May county.
- NORTHERN FLICKER** (*Colaptes auratus*) – Ubiquitous, including loose groups of a dozen or more bounding over the fields at Higbee's on several mornings.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

- AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*) – Small numbers drifted over the CMPSP on several days, including a few following the dune line south. But the biggest number were the 8 or 10 we found hovering over (or perched on fences along the edge of) the runways of the Cape May Airport.
- MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – A few streaked past over CMPSP, and we saw others over the back bay marshes on our boat trip. This feisty little raptor is darker and stockier than the smaller American Kestrel is.
- PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – This was probably the most common falcon of the trip -- a far cry from the dark days of DDT poisoning! We had scattered individuals circling over CMPSP, and a pair (showing the substantial size difference between little males and big females) on the nest tower at Forsythe NWR.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

- EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE** (*Contopus virens*) – One hunted from a broken snag along a field edge at Higbee's, returning again and again to the same branch.
- EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*) – Regular throughout the week, including some with among the wave of birds that crossed Sea Grove Avenue on our first morning of the tour, and a few with the mixed flock around CMBO's Northwood Center.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

- RED-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo olivaceus*) – Common and widespread (particularly in wooded areas) throughout the tour, including several investigating the treetops around CMBO's Northwood Center.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

- BLUE JAY** (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Common throughout, including some seen carrying acorns across the fields at Higbee's.
- AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Also regular throughout, often heard cawing in the distance at various places around Cape May.
- FISH CROW** (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Seemingly less common than the previous species, though we did hear them calling (a distinctively nasal sound) on

most days. Some in flight over CMPSP showed their narrower "hand" nicely as they rowed past.

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – Their penchant for rummaging around in the grass meant we had to watch them for a while before everybody was satisfied with their looks. Fortunately, they eventually began to perch up on some of the signs and directional markers around the Cape May airport's runways.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – At least five zoomed over CMPSP's Lighthouse Pond one early afternoon, seen by most (with Mike's help) from the picnic shelter as I put our lunch together.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Anybody who missed Tree Swallow this week wasn't trying very hard. We saw thousands and thousands and thousands in big swirling clouds on most of the days of the tour -- even non-birders noticed them!

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – A few winged past over the plover ponds one morning, part of a big passing flock of Tree Swallows. Most Barn Swallows have headed south before the start of our tours; they winter far to the south of the US, with some going all the way to the southern tip of South America!

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Common throughout, with those visiting the hanging feeders outside CMBO's Northwood Center giving us particularly good chance for study.

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – Also regular, though generally less obvious than the previous species; a confiding family group at Higbee's put on a pretty nice show -- even calling back when I whistled to them.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – One in a big brush pile at CMPSP twitched into and out of view -- nice spotting, Diane!

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – Super views of one among the cattails in a wet area at CMPSP, seen from one of the boardwalks. This species is a breeding visitor to New Jersey, though the occasional bird sometimes attempts to overwinter here.

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – As usual, this species was far more easily heard than seen. We did catch up with a few (fleetingly) at CMPSP, but Pete never did get his "perfect picture" moment!

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – The arrival of this species in Cape May signals the wind-down of passerine migration. We found small numbers on a few days, including a handful among the junipers at Higbee's one morning.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – Scattered individuals, usually trailing along with mixed warbler flocks. The nervous, wing-flicking behavior of this species quickly identifies them in a crowd.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Scattered birds -- only a handful compared to the tens of thousands that will pass through the area slightly later in the fall.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Abundant, particularly on that first morning, when wave after wave of them filtered through the viny tangles and flowed across Sea Grove Avenue. We quickly lost count of how many we saw!

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*) – A few on most days of the tour, including one that sat out in the open at Higbee's one morning and another that checked out the flower beds with the big sparrow flock we found at Stone Harbor Bird Sanctuary.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Common throughout, including a regular bird singing from the bushes near the parking lot at CMPSP most days.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Abundant throughout. [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – A few flyover birds our last morning, picked out by their distinctive "pip-it" calls and long-tailed appearance.

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Particularly nice views of a group of youngsters stripping the purple Pokeweed berries from a stand at the Stone Harbor Bird Sanctuary; we saw many other flocks in bounding flight.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

BLUE-WINGED WARBLER (*Vermivora cyanoptera*) – One flitting among the ivy-covered trees around the Cape May Bird Observatory's Northwood Center played hard to get, showing well for some and not at all for others.

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – Seen creeping up tree trunks and along branches in forested areas all over our tour route. A few near CMBO's Northwood Center gave us especially nice views.

NASHVILLE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*) – One near the Northwood Center made us work a bit to get everybody a look, but we got there in the end! The big white eyering on this species is distinctive.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Abundant throughout, with dozens bouncing through the tall weeds in the fields at Higbee's.

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – A female (or possibly first-year male) near the Northwood Center seemed to be shadowing a nearby male Black-throated Blue Warbler -- appearing every time he did, and disappearing off into the vegetation right behind him.

CAPE MAY WARBLER (*Setophaga tigrina*) – Fortunately, we connected with one of these -- practically a requirement for a tour with this name -- at Higbee's one morning. Though the first-ever specimen of this species was collected here, it's not especially common.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – A few of these small, short-tailed warblers mingled among the mixed flock outside the Northwood Center.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – A trio of drab females/youngsters mixed with the Prairie and Black-throated Green warblers in some

junipers near the CMPSP picnic shelter.

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – Fairly common at CMPSP and around the Northwood Center, where we had multiple chances to practice looking for their distinctive yellowish feet and the faint streaking on their backs and breasts.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – Seen particularly well outside CMBO's Northwood Center, where a male repeatedly flitted across the ground or hunted from low branches near the staff parking area. What a stunner!

PALM WARBLER (*Setophaga palmarum*) – These little tail waggers were particularly common along the dunes at CMPSP, though we also had a few in the junipers outside the Northwood Center.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (*Setophaga coronata*) – By far the most common warbler of the trip. Many of these will overwinter in southern New Jersey.

PRAIRIE WARBLER (*Setophaga discolor*) – A trio foraging among the junipers near our picnic shelter at CMPSP allowed super study; they were certainly confiding!

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*) – A couple accompanied the Prairie Warblers near the CMPSP picnic shelter, and we saw a few others at Higbee's one morning.

CANADA WARBLER (*Cardellina canadensis*) – One low in the bushes along Sea Grove Avenue, part of the big mixed flock our first morning, was a surprise. It's getting late for Canada Warblers by the time our tours run.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

SALTMARSH SPARROW (*Ammodramus caudatus*) – At least two from The Osprey, both in close comparison with a nearby Seaside Sparrow.

They were something of a challenge to find initially -- blending nicely with their surroundings -- but stayed out in the open for a while once we found them.

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – One with a few of the previous species in the back bay saltmarsh near Wildwood; this one looked dark overall, with a conspicuously white throat.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – A couple feeding on the ground at the Stone Harbor Bird Sanctuary were part of the impromptu "sparrow workshop" we had there. The head pattern of this species is decidedly more subdued in the winter than it is in the breeding season.

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW (*Spizella pallida*) – One with the big sparrow flock at Stone Harbor Bird Sanctuary was a bit of a surprise. This species is a regular autumn vagrant to the Cape May area, but is nowhere common.

FIELD SPARROW (*Spizella pusilla*) – A couple of birds in our "back 40" were a bit furtive to start with, but eventually perched up for all to see.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – An adult, flashing its snazzy eponymous head stripes, sat stock-still on the sidewalk outside of the Forsythe NWR visitor's center.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – We heard the soft contact calls of this species from the undergrowth at Higbee's, and got quick glimpses of a few there, but our best views came at CMBO's Northwood Center, where one bold bird foraged in the open under the feeders.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Regular throughout, with especially nice scope studies of several scurrying around on the trails at the Meadows.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – One of our more common sparrows, seen on most days -- with particularly good studies of a few along the field edges at Higbee's.

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Another common sparrow this week, with several bouncing through the taller grasses or foraging along the path edges at Higbee's. One proved particularly distracting where we were looking for our Marsh Wren -- some folks kept finding this one instead!

EASTERN TOWHEE (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) – We heard the distinctive "toe eeee" calls of this species on several days (at both CMPSP and Higbee's), but never laid eyes on the birds themselves. [✱]

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Several seen nicely, particularly at feeders around Cape May Point -- including those at CMBO.

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*)

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – Reasonably common throughout the tour, but our best views came at the Stone Harbor Bird Sanctuary, where several drab females/youngsters investigated the mulch in flower beds around the parking lot.

DICKCISSEL (*Spiza americana*) – A handful of flyover birds on our last morning gave their distinctive "farting" flight calls. There have been a surprising number of this normally uncommon species in Cape May this fall.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

BOBOLINK (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – One at CMPSP on our first morning's walk was cooperative, perched right at the top of a reed stem. Most of the birds we saw were in bounding flight high overhead -- and some were so high that our only indication they were there was their "link link" calls raining down from the heavens.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Common and widespread, with many southbound flocks passing overhead and restive groups surging in and out of the reedbeds at Forsythe NWR.

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*) – A handful of birds flew over one of the fields at Higbee's one morning, showing their distinctively starling-like flight -- quick, fluttery flaps, and glides with their wings held partially opened. Of course, those yellow bellies also helped with the ID!

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – This species is often surprisingly tough to find during our tour (which coincides with their molt period); we found a few near our hotel one morning.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – Especially nice looks at many at Forsythe NWR, with others on our back bay boat trip and on Nummy Island. The females are smaller and browner than the males, which was particularly noticeable in the foraging flock we found on Nummy Island.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – Our biggest group was spotted near the Philadelphia sewage works as we left the airport; their "tail in the air" feeding posture is distinctive. We saw others at CMPSP and Forsythe NWR.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE (*Icterus galbula*) – One near the top of the Siberian Elm over the Northwood Center was late; most are gone by the time of our second tour.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Scattered pairs, typically around CMPSP or the Meadows. This species has been hard hit locally by

conjunctivitis. [I]

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – Regular, including several small groups feeding quietly among the dried sunflower heads along the boardwalk trail at CMPSP.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Daily at the hotel, with others in various places around town. [I]

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – One scuttled along the track at the Meadows, and another bounced along the edge of the road near Stone Harbor Bird Sanctuary.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Common across much of the county, including multiple animals leaping from branch to branch at Higbee's and Cox Hall Creek WMA.

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*) – One paddled across an impoundment at Forsythe NWR, leaving an arrow-shaped wake behind it.

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – A good-sized pod seen from the Meadows, their fins regularly breaking the surface as they hunted.

NORTHERN RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*) – Two loped across the road in front of our van as we headed for CMPSP one morning.

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – A wary trio stood along the edge of a field on Sea Grove Avenue, then stepped into the woods.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 144 bird taxa and 6 mammal taxa