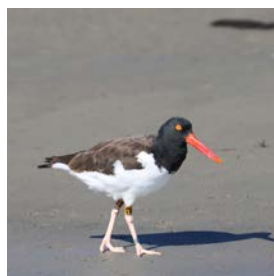


# Cape May: Fall Migration | Oct. 10 – 16 2023

## Trip Report | by James P. Smith



**With guides James P. Smith and Rick Weiman and participants: Kate, John, Bob, Jim & Jean, Jay & Natalie, Mike & Phyllis, Dave and Maggie.**



A most excellent birding tour perhaps as memorable for the humor and group camaraderie as it was for the massive migration of land birds we witnessed as a mindboggling 77,000 migrants passed through Higbee Beach WMA on October 13<sup>th</sup>. Once again, Cape May more than lived up to its reputation as the premier spot for bird migration on the East Coast of the USA.

**Tues., Oct. 10**

**Arrivals | Philadelphia International Airport | Sea Crest Inn | Cape May Point State Park**

A beautiful fall day greeted Naturalist Journeys as the guides divided forces to pick up tour participants from Philadelphia International Airport. The journey south was smooth, traffic free and included a welcome break at the Faulkner Services along the Garden State Parkway. The roadside oaks and maples showed hints and shades of fabulous fall color. Birds were relatively few on the drive though we did note Turkey Vultures, Red-tailed and



Sharp-shinned Hawks and other common species such as Herring Gull, Mourning Dove and Great Egret as we drew closer to Cape May. The journey passed quickly and in no time at all, or so it seemed, we were driving onto Cape Island passing through picturesque timber board neighborhoods full of charm and character in one of the most historic vacation towns on the Eastern Seaboard.

Mike and Phyllis, Dave and Maggie, and John arrived independently at the Sea Crest and the site manager had already prepared room keys well in advance. Even though we arrived early, check-in was seamless and we relaxed for a little while in our comfortable rooms, home for the next six nights. The Atlantic Ocean was quite literally just across the street, close enough to hear the pounding of the waves from our hotel. At 4pm most of the group gathered outside the Sea Crest for a taste of Cape May and the migration wonders that lay ahead. Cape May Point State Park is a mere ten minute drive from the Sea Crest and offers the perfect venue for an hour or so of prime birding before sundown. The famous hawk watch platform overlooking Bunker Pond provided a great orientation point with views of Cape May Meadows to the east, Cape May's historic lighthouse to the west, and the dunes and Atlantic Ocean to the south.

Most of the day's birders had already dispersed and the platform was lightly attended. Bunker Pond right in front of the platform hosted an excellent variety of waterfowl sometimes harassed by passing marauding raptors including Peregrine, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks. But for the most part it was a calm, balmy evening with plenty of waterfowl on show; Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, American Black Duck, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Pied-billed Grebe and (surprisingly) five Ruddy Ducks and six American Coots. Rick arrived a little later with Bob, Jim and Jean just in time to enjoy several Merlins migrating, despite the late hour. We also enjoyed low overhead passages of as many as six Ospreys, all beautifully illuminated in the pristine evening light. Indeed, the quality of light assisted the finding of a juvenile Black-crowned Night-heron tucked away in the base of the *phragmites* reeds at the edge of the pond. Songbirds were few but we did hear a Carolina Wren and a couple of 'mewing' Gray Catbirds. As the sun set dramatically behind Cape May light we returned to the Sea Crest Inn to freshen up before heading out to the Sapore Italinao Restaurant, a wonderful venue for our first dinner together and new friendships formed.





**Wed., Oct. 11**

**Cape May Beach | Revolution Rail | Garrett Family Preserve | Beach Plum Farm | Cape May Bird Observatory | Cape May Point State Park.**

The day began well before sunrise as we gathered outside the Sea Crest for an early morning walk along the beach. Normally it's quite bracing in mid-October but this morning was a little muggy and surprisingly mild as the sun rose over the Atlantic Ocean. Flights Laughing Gulls and good numbers of Royal Terns passed west along the beach towards Cape May Point offering great views. An impressive flock of Black Skimmers, perhaps 300 strong, lifted up along the beach swirling and wheeling in immaculate, mesmerizing formations before settling down on the shore. Formerly rare Lesser Black-backed Gulls outnumbered the Great Black-backed Gulls, allowing for great comparative studies. An Ocean View breakfast was next on the agenda but not before we added Brown Pelican and Black Scoter to our bird lists getting the day off to an excellent start!

After a hearty breakfast we headed across Cape May town to the welcome center on Lafayette Street and joined the relatively new **Revolution Rail** tours, a roughly 4 mile bike tour on rails through conservation land, destination Cape May Channel. The so called 'bikes' are ergonomically designed for easy pedaling, so even with just one person of a team of four pedaling the bike's momentum will move the whole carriage forward. Birds on the outward leg included Great Blue Heron, Great and Snowy Egrets, Northern Mockingbird, Carolina Wren, one or two Cooper's Hawks and really fine views of American Black Duck. On reaching the channel, Jake gave a great talk on the local history and how the channel was used in World War II. Behind him as he talked, small kettles of Black Vultures began to form over the north side of the channel, a species most welcome for Jim and Jean!

The next stop en route was TNC's Garrett Family Preserve. We walked a myriad of neatly maintained trails but found little in the way of migrants instead having good views of local breeders such as Brown Thrasher and Carolina Chickadee. Perhaps less expected was a flock of nine White Ibis soaring and cruising just above the tree line. And, we had really excellent views of a Bald Eagle as Atlantic Mud Fiddler Crabs scuttled all around us in the saltmarsh. A handful of butterflies identified included Pearl Crescent, Red Admiral, Painted Lady and of course, several migrating Monarchs.

After Revolution Rail we moved onto Cape May Bird Observatory (CMBO) and its well-appointed optics and gift shop. A beautifully preserved woodlot behind the center provides excellent cover for migrants and is accessed



by a small network of trails. This was a particularly sweet spot for our group with migrants on view from the outset; Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Northern Parula, American Redstart, and a couple of Red-eyed Vireos all popped into view and the familiar '*chip*' calls of passing Yellow-rumped Warblers could be heard throughout. A Prairie Warbler put on the most fabulous show and stood out as being unusual in both choice of location and habitat. Meanwhile, Rick had been busy studying some sapsucker holes drilled around the trunk of a cherry just across the street. Sure enough a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker appeared within minutes along with an immature Cape May Warbler in tow. The warbler was evidently gleaning sugars from the sap seeping from the sapsucker holes and was very cool to watch! All in all, we had an excellent hour at the CMBO and duly set off to Beach Plum Farm for lunch. This open air venue replete with picnic tables proved for excellent raptor viewing and as we waited for our food Red-shouldered Hawk, several Northern Harriers and at least three Bald Eagles all appeared overhead before lunch was served!

The raptors moving over Beach Plum inspired a short but worthwhile visit to the Hawkwatch Platform back at Cape May Point. Things were a little slow at first but there was a nice showing of Broad winged Hawks, most of them juveniles, and some Northern Harriers and American Kestrels passed by. Bunker Pond was busy with waterfowl, most of which we'd seen the evening before but this time including two local rarities; Eared Grebe and Eurasian Wigeon. The wigeon was quite easy to spot amid his American cousins but the grebe was challenging to say the least, seemingly spending more time under the water than above it! Fortunately, the Eared Grebe would prove to be much more obliging for us as the week progressed. After being absent the previous day it was good see several hundred Tree Swallows passing by as well. Later we embarked on the boardwalk trails through mature Eastern Red Cedars to Lighthouse Pond. Exquisite views of close-range waterfowl in superb autumnal sunshine were soon enjoyed with Gadwall among the most abundant, busily engaged in courtship behavior, plus great comparative studies of Blue-winged and Green-winged Teals, American Wigeon and Northern Pintail, Mallard and American Black Duck. We found Pond Sliders too and marveled at the high flying migrating Monarchs constantly passing overhead.

A busy first full day at Cape May was coming to an end. After shopping for breakfast items in town we headed back to the Sea Crest to freshen up for dinner. The Blue Pig Tavern inside the historic Congress Hall at Cape May was the venue, and another great spot chosen by Rick!



**Thurs., Oct. 12**

**Edwin B. Forsythe NWR | Avalon Seawatch | Harbor View Restaurant | Todd Pover on beach nesting shorebirds**

The second morning of the tour saw an early departure from the Sea Crest with our destination Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, a spot traditionally known to birders as “Brig” or Brigantine. The drive north along the Garden State Parkway was punctuated by a few White-tailed Deer feeding in the median, several Bald Eagles and Great Blue Herons, Great and Snowy Egrets foraging in the tidal saltmarshes.

The warm, sunny conditions of the previous day continued and arrival at ‘Brig’ found the parking lot and HQ area busy with Yellow-rumped Warblers as well as a couple of Blackpoll Warblers and a pair of White-breasted Nuthatch. Several American Robins filtered through the oaks and cedars and a couple of Brown Thrashers showed especially well in the autumn sunshine amid the Red Maples.

After thirty minutes or so it was time to head out on the one-way drive loop first stopping at a boardwalk offering fine views across the saltmarsh toward Atlantic City, the famous skyline some distance to the south. A couple of Clapper Rails went unseen as they called at this spot but the real prize was good views of a couple of Marsh Wrens skulking in the *phragmites* right below the boardwalk. We moved onto the next pool and enjoyed immaculate views of five Wood Ducks in crisp autumnal sunshine as well as a slightly surprising juvenile Hooded Merganser. The surrounding rank grasses were full of Swamp and Song Sparrows, some of which offered great views and we were treated to perched views of a perched Belted Kingfisher.

The size of the refuge is massive, about 48,000 acres, and the eight mile drive loop on a raised berm offers views of a range of fresh, brackish and saltwater habitats. Water levels appeared especially high during our visit and as a result shore birds were relatively few though we did enjoy Black-bellied Plovers, a fine side-by-side comparison of Western and Semipalmated Sandpipers and a roost of about 150 Greater Yellowlegs. Each species came with its own unique identification challenge as all the shorebirds on view were in non-breeding plumage. Northern Harriers seemed to be everywhere and we had superb eye-level looks at foraging Caspian and Forster’s Terns. Rick discovered a late Bobolink, a bird which was kind enough to sit up and cooperate for scope views for the entire group. And, there was a ‘feeding frenzy’ of Great Blue Herons, Great and Snowy Egrets that included two Glossy Ibis...the only sighting of the latter species for the entire tour. A little farther out a raft of

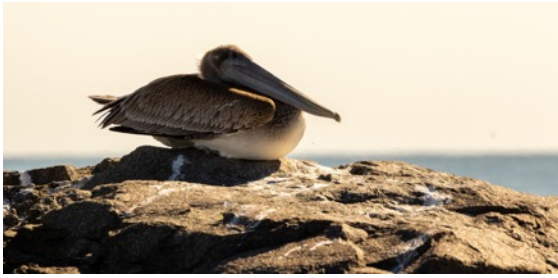




over 30 Ruddy Ducks included some fine males, and on the saltmarsh side of the berm a Clapper Rail scuttled awkwardly across the channel! An apparently fearless juvenile Black-crowned Night-heron put on quite the show as it foraged with Snowy Egrets from a culvert right at the side of the berm... Farther around the drive loop impressive concentrations of waterfowl were gathered with hundreds of Northern Pintail, some Northern Shoveler, Gadwall and Ruddy Ducks, and smaller numbers of Mallard and American Black Duck. An exposed sandbar supported an impressive flock of 25 resting Caspian Terns, easily the largest concentration we'd seen on the tour. Around the next bend, a roost of Black-crowned Night-herons was drawing the crowds with some birds neatly hidden in an isolated grove of Eastern Red Cedars. Other birds sat in the open seemingly content with all the attention! As if that wasn't enough a further 14 night-herons flew across the marsh to join those already at roost resulting in a gathering of at least 25 Black-crowned Night-herons in the cedars! As we approached early afternoon, the drive loop brought us around facing the sun and the solar glare was admittedly becoming a problem for viewing. It was all rather timely since it was just about time to head for lunch in Galloway Township at the small, family run, Cracked Egg Café.

By mid-afternoon we were heading south toward the Avalon Seawatch, a dedicated migration watch point for years and typically operated by one or more staff counters from the Cape May Bird Observatory. Tucked under the dunes just south of the Avalon Seawall the station is slightly elevated, something of an advantage for counting migrant seabirds and ducks that may pass deep within the wave troughs. The CMBO counters face north-east and watch for flocks of southbound migrants hugging the seacoast many of which can be seen at a some distance to north, well before they pass Avalon. Weather conditions weren't optimal for our visit. It was decidedly warm with light breezes coming from the south-west but we did have some nice flights of Double-crested Cormorants, Surf and Black Scoters, our first Dunlin, several Semipalmated Plovers and a flight of 11 American Oystercatchers. Indeed, the seawatch proved perfect for the study of closely related species such as Royal and Caspian Terns. During the quieter moments, Atlantic Bottle-nosed Dolphins entertained us appearing just beyond the sea wall!

Dinner was at the Harbor View in Wildwood where we joined by Rick's friend Todd Pover, Senior Wildlife Biologist with the Conserve Wildlife Foundation in New Jersey. After dinner Todd delivered a brilliant presentation (hosted in Mike & Phyllis's room) on the subject of beach nesting bird species focusing on Piping Plover, American Oystercatcher, Least Tern and Black Skimmer. There was also discussion of the recently formed Horseshoe Island on the NJ coast where the successful breeding of large numbers Royal Terns had come as a genuine surprise to local biologists.



**Fri., Oct. 13**

## **Higbee Beach WMA | Cape May Point SP | Osprey Boat Cruise | Cape May Harbor | Seagrove Ave**

The hoped-for change in weather had finally materialized after a prolonged spell of warm southerlies. The wind swung around to the North-west during the night and the temperature dropped accordingly. The pre-dawn air around the Sea Crest Inn was full of the chips, squeaks and barks of nocturnal migrants; Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night-heron and American Bittern pierced the chilly air along with croaking calls and passerines such as Gray-cheeked Thrush, Veery, White-throated and Song Sparrows as well as loads of Yellow-rumped Warblers could all be heard around the hotel. As we gathered at the vehicles a Marsh Wren was found freshly dead in the hotel parking lot, perhaps having collided with a window, and a stark reminder of the perils faced by all birds during migration.

There was only one place to be on a morning such as this – Higbee Beach WMA. As we drove by the fields and houses of West Cape May, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawk patrolled the hedgerows looking for an early meal. Arrival at Higbee Beach was greeted by relatively few parked vehicles, surprising since the conditions looked prime for a big flight. However, we needn't have worried as streams of Yellow-rumped Warblers, bounced and buffeted by the NW winds, poured out from the woodlands and over the viewing platform before heading north. Atop the famous Higbee dike, dedicated CMBO counters endured the blustery wind and worked on the official tally while we enjoyed a more sheltered spot below. Aside from a very friendly CMBO counter we had most of the viewing platform to ourselves. From then on we settled down and enjoyed the most marvelous spectacle of land bird migration most of us had ever witnessed. For the next two hours birds came over, under and even through the viewing platform. It was simply mind-boggling to marvel at the event taking place before us but by way of trying to put the flight into some sort of context the official CMBO counters tallied; 667 Northern Flickers, 811 Cedar Waxwings, 150 Golden-crowned Kinglets, 118 American Robins, 21 Eastern Meadowlarks, 131 Northern Parulas, 214 Palm Warblers, 12,700 unidentified warblers and an extra-ordinary high of 61,500 Yellow-rumped Warblers! Such massive migration days are rare but fortunately we'd timed our visit perfectly! Below the platform, residents such as Brown Thrasher, Carolina Wren, Gray Catbird and Northern Cardinal seemed determined to get in on the action and put on a show alongside White-throated and Song Sparrows and the first Dark-eyed Juncos of the tour. There was drama between predator and prey as a Cooper's Hawk 'collected' a Northern Flicker in flight and then settled into a leafless sumac to pluck and eat it, or so it thought. Somehow, after a good deal of thrashing around, the flicker worked itself free and flew off to join some of the other 667 flickers recorded at Higbee Beach that day!



In need of a breather and bathrooms we headed over to Cape May Point anticipating a decent flight of raptors but the wind had dropped, the clouds dispersed and calm conditions prevailed. Few raptors were on the move but our journey wasn't wasted. A Baltimore Oriole appeared in the cedars right by the hawk watch platform and a call went out for "woodpecker" just as a beautiful juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker flew right over the platform heading towards Sunset Blvd. With good views of the Eurasian Wigeon and Eared Grebe on Bunker Pond and a large flock of 45 White Ibis flying over, it had certainly been a very rewarding visit.

An impromptu lunch at the Bella Vida café was a great success with (arguably) the most varied menu on Cape May and a great spot of vegetarians and coffee lovers alike. Outside, more Yellow-rumped Warblers and a Common Yellowthroat worked a vine covered trellis in full view as we dined. As Rick said, "I hope you like the Bella Vida because we're back here this evening". Given the excellence of the lunch (and service) it wasn't going to be a hardship to return that evening. But, we were running a late and bolted across town to Miss Chris Marina boarding the Osprey for an afternoon boat adventure in Cape May Harbor and its surrounding inlets. The birds came thick and fast, and we had a wonderful Captain and Naturalist on board as well as over 20 pairs of eyes! Laughing Gulls 'laughed' and Fish Crows 'cawed' as we moved off the dock and we were soon enjoying Forsters's Terns and Ruddy Turnstones at close range. The state of the tide was perfect for observing a number of shorebirds on the flats most notably a really fine group of American Oystercatchers along with Sanderling, Dunlin and a handful of Semipalmated Sandpipers. The seawalls and boulder jetties of Cold Spring Inlet were full of resting birds including no less than seven Brown Pelicans and five Great Cormorants. Before we headed back to Miss Chris Marina Captain Bob had one more trick up his sleeve and pulled into a quiet, semi-industrial inlet. Admittedly it didn't look especially promising but some habitats can be deceiving and after some scanning we started to find night-herons in the cedars and *phragmites* reeds. Pretty soon we'd found nine Black-crowned and two Yellow-crowned Night-herons! Boat-tailed Grackles, roosting Short-billed Dowitchers and a flock of 35 Fish Crows were all found before docking back at the Marina. A few in our party elected for some down time back at the hotel while the rest went along with James to Seagrove Ave to explore a new birding park. Eastern Phoebe showed well around the parking area while the understory appeared to be full of White-throated and Song Sparrows. Jim picked out a Red-eyed Vireo and Rick showed up holding a Golden-crowned kinglet in his hand having rescued it from an untimely end in the open road - the poor thing had most likely collided with a vehicle. Rick mentioned the woodland at Seagrove Ave was good for creepers and sure enough, the last bird we logged there ended being a Brown Creeper!





As promised we returned to Bella Vida for dinner and very fine it was too with a nice ambience allowing us to go through the bird list in relative peace and quiet. It had been a remarkably full day and exactly the sort of day that one would hope to experience at Cape May.

## **Sat., Oct. 14                      Higbee Beach WMA | Cape May Point State Park | Wetlands Institute**

The day dawned cloudy combined with a complete shift in wind direction and a light breeze coming from the South-east. There was enough ambient glow in the low cloud base to create the most spectacular sky at sunrise! Our destination was Higbee Beach WMA once more beginning with a brief visit to the morning flight platform followed by an exploration of the trails around the fields and woodlots slightly inland from the coast. South-easterlies are not especially favorable winds at Cape May and compared to the riches of the previous day it was admittedly a little quiet. Jim spotted a high-flying Common Loon and we had fairly good numbers of Yellow-rumped Warblers, Northern Flickers and several Sharp-shinned Hawks and Northern Harriers moving over the fields. Though migrants were scarce we actually did well for views of local breeding species including Red-bellied Woodpecker, Brown Thrasher, Northern Cardinal, Gray Catbird, Carolina Wren and Carolina Chickadee. A Winter Wren giving its characteristic double 'chip' notes came as a bigger surprise when it called from the thickets and most of our group managed to get at least some views of the little skulker. Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets showed well and further exploration of the fields produced Red-shouldered Hawk, Blue-headed Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a couple of Field Sparrows.

Mid-morning saw the group back at Cape May Point State Park where we watched an amazing hawk banding demo, including a feisty young male Cooper's Hawk and a rather more passive juvenile female Sharp-shinned Hawk being the key subjects of attention. Despite the time of day and the complete cloud cover, surprising numbers of warblers appeared to be moving overhead and through the park, most of them Yellow-rumped but also a few Blackpoll and Cape May Warblers. Bunker Pond continued to host good numbers of waterfowl with Gadwall among the most abundant but also Blue-winged and Green-winged Teals, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Mallard and American Black Duck. Of the rare and scarce species, Common Gallinule, Eurasian Wigeon and Eared Grebe were still present offering pretty scope good views. Several Golden-crowned Kinglets gave their thin, wispy calls as they fed at incredibly close range in the cedars just beyond the platform.



Rain stopped play at 11 am just as the forecast suggested it might though we'd actually done well to have a relatively rain-free, birdy morning. The Ocean View Restaurant provided the perfect venue for a leisurely brunch and, perhaps anticipating a wet afternoon, a few in our party opted for 'downtime' at the Sea Crest while the rest headed north, driving through steady drizzle to the Wetlands Institute at Stone Harbor Blvd. By the time we arrived the rain had started in earnest making the birding difficult but with perseverance we enjoyed good views of Song and White-throated Sparrows on the lawn, and Black-bellied Plovers out in the salt marsh. A Wilson's Snipe was a bigger surprise flying over the marshes and, with careful scanning, we managed to 'winkle out' a Little Blue Heron and two Tri-colored Herons and as well as good numbers of resting Great Blue Herons. John found a Winter Wren (the second of the day) lurking around the main institute building and we all had exceptional views of close range Ruby-crowned Kinglets feeding in the *phragmites*. The dinner plan was a pizza party very kindly hosted by Phyllis and Mike, followed by the bird list and an in-room presentation on Horseshoe Island giving by Rick.

**Sun., Oct. 15**

## **Avalon Sea Watch | South Cape May Meadows | Cape May Point State Park | Cape May Historical District (Washington Square)**

A major cold front passed through overnight and, spurred on by winds in the North, we headed straight for the Avalon Seawatch hoping for a strong scoter flight. While conditions appeared perfect, it was definitely surprising to find relatively few birds moving at Avalon. Our friend Scott Sumner had the same idea but by the time we arrived, he'd already turned his attention to the shorebirds resting under the seawall where several Western Sandpipers were present among the Sanderling, Dunlin and Semipalmated Plovers. The light was good and the views exceptional, and certainly worth pausing for shorebirds before we arrived at the seawatch station. The most common visible migrant was Double-crested Cormorant pushing south in large 'ribbon-like' V formations. Black Scoters flew south in smaller flocks and we managed to pick out a couple of female Surf Scoters with them. On the plus side we did have some great views of Brant, our first of the tour, as they flew inland along the inlet beautifully illuminated by the sun. With patience up to four Northern Gannets could be seen foraging way offshore and it was especially bizarre to see a couple of Bald Eagles way to sea, battling against the wind trying to get and get back to land! A few passerine migrants were moving in addition Yellow-rumped Warblers with Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Palm Warbler and Savannah Sparrow all noted flying in off the sea. We spent some time at Avalon watching the migration and just enjoying the place itself. After a bracing morning in the field



there was no better place for brunch than Uncle Ben's Pancake House! After brunch we head south to Cape May Meadows, a Nature Conservancy Restoration project replete with freshwater wetlands and a heavily vegetated dune system. The first part of the one mile loop would take us through the wetlands to an elevated platform overlooking the many dabbling ducks and Canada Geese. Shorebirds were few perhaps due to high water levels but three Lesser Yellowlegs fed around the Canada Geese. Close to them was a dowitcher probing in deep water.....and it proved a Long-billed Dowitcher, out first of the trip. We walked the remainder of the loop enjoying Cape May Meadows as swirls of Tree Swallows flew over the wetlands and Northern Mockingbirds, Gray Catbirds and Carolina Wrens called from the thickets while raptors moved overhead including Broad-winged Hawks and several Bald Eagles. Mike and Phyllis also had the fortune to watch a Northern Water Snake chasing a Common Gallinule!

The final afternoon saw some of our party heading for the Washington Street Mall pedestrian precinct in Historic Cape May. Others chose to revisit the hawk watch platform or have some down time at the Sea Crest Inn, and it was never too late for a final walk along the beach where the Black Skimmers put on a fine evening show. We thoroughly enjoyed a farewell dinner at the cozy Oyster Bay Restaurant where Rick had skillfully secured a group reservation on another busy evening as he had done throughout the tour. And then it was back to the Sea Crest Inn where Mike and Phyllis, once again, generously hosted the bird list as they had done for most evenings on the tour.....thank you Mike & Phyllis! We couldn't reach a consensus on the most popular bird of the trip but Wood Duck, Snowy Egret, Merlin, Osprey, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Winter Wren and Golden-crowned Kinglet were all given honorable mentions. Higbee Beach WMA and the morning flight platform was voted the best birding site with Edwin B. Fortsythe coming in a close second.

## **Mon., Oct. 16                      Departures**

A fabulous week had come to end. We said our good-byes beside the lobby of the Sea Crest Inn. During the week we'd enjoyed wonderful group camaraderie and shared the wonders of bird migration throughout the Cape May peninsula in the healthiest possible way. Jim and Jean, Jay and Natalie, and Bob headed north with James to Philadelphia International Airport enjoying another pleasantly traffic free drive to arrive in good time for flights home, or to meet up with family in Philly. Meanwhile Rick hosted a final delicious breakfast at the Bella Vida café and was joined by Kate, John, Mike and Phyllis, Dave and Maggie before going their separate ways. Cape May had truly delivered living up its reputation as one of the most exciting birding destinations on the east coast. Thank you to all our participants for making this tour so enjoyable and to Rick for his tireless work behind the scenes.

*Photos: Group (James P Smith - JS), Western Sandpiper on left & Sanderlings (JS), American Oystercatcher (James Jutzy - JJ), Monarch (David Lurie - DL), Black-crowned Night Heron (JS), Group birding (JS), Ring-billed Gull (JJ), Sunset (JS), Brown*



*Thrasher (JS), Bald Eagle (JS), Group at Lighthouse Pond (JS), Lighthouse Pond (JS), Common Yellowthroat (Jean Wiese - JW), Semipalmated Plover & Sandpiper (JW), American Goldfinch (JJ), Forster's Terns (JS), Egrets (JJ), Brown Pelican (JW), Sanderling-Dunlin-Avalon (JS), Birding (John Trezise - JT), Red-tailed Hawk (JW), Black Skimmers (JW), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (JS), Monarch (DL), James (JW), Semipalmated Plover (JJ), Group beach birding (JT), Migration counters (JS)*