

Cape May Fall Migration | Species List

October 18 - 24, 2021



With guides James P. Smith and Rick Weiman and participants: Cyndy, Dee, David, Ellen, Gayle, Jean F., Jean R., Jim, Maria and Tootie.

Compiled by James P. Smith

Summary:

Cape May is easily the premier destination to observe large scale bird migration along the east coast of the United States. No other location can match the volume, consistency and pure 'visibility' of migrants found at Cape May. Our visit in the third week of October was more than just a taste of Cape May magic and featured 140 bird species and a catalogue of rarities that included Eurasian Wigeon, American Avocet, Anhinga, Golden Eagle and Vermilion Flycatcher. Most of the key birding sites could be found within 15 minutes of our beach front hotel further highlighting Cape May's unique geography and rich array of easy-to-reach habitats. All this combined with Cape May's historic charm and architecture, made for an exceptional week of late fall birding. Moreover, throughout the tour we enjoyed some wonderful group camaraderie neatly book-ended by Rick Weiman's tireless work behind the scenes - thank you Rick, and all of our 2021 Cape May participants for helping to make this such an enjoyable to lead. We will be back!

(HO)= Distinctive enough to be counted as a heard-only.

(LO) = Observed by one or both of the guides but not by the tour participants.

(I)=Introduced/invasive

BIRDS (140 bird species recorded, of which two were leader only):

DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS: Anatidae (18)

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens* – two adults seen from the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st. One of the pair appeared to have a damaged left wing.

Brant *Branta bernicula* – 'Atlantic' Brant (*B. b. hrota*) were present in large numbers in Cape May Harbor on the 19th and at Two Mile Landing on the 22nd. Best viewed while on the Osprey boat excursion when about 150 were seen, some at close range.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*— small migrating skeins were noted on all days of the tour, most frequently from the Hawk Watch Platform.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* (I)—daily fare on the freshwater pools around Cape May Point State Park, especially Bunker Pond.

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*— this most attractive small duck gave an excellent sequence of sightings from the ponds at Cape May Point State Park.

Blue-winged Teal *Spatula discors*—another beautiful duck recorded on at least three days of the trip with about a dozen at Cape May Point State Park on the 20th.

Northern Shoveler *Spatulata clypeata* – single males were found at Cape May Point State Park on two dates but the real concentrations were found at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st when at least 60 were present.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera* – common at Cape May Point State Park where Bunker and Lighthouse Ponds hosted good numbers. They could often be seen at close range from the boardwalk with the males, visibly and relentlessly courting females - an absolute treat to watch!

American Wigeon *Mareca americana* – daily fare, often present in numbers on the wetlands at Cape May Point. Lighthouse Pond offered majestic views of wigeons from the boardwalk whilst the largest flocks (up to 300) were seen at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope* – something of a rarity, a stunning male of this Old World species graced Lighthouse Pond among its American cousins on the 20th.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*— small groups at the wetlands around Cape May Point, Cape May Meadows, as well as other wetland locations throughout the tour.

American Black Duck *Anas rubripes*—this unobtrusive denizen of the North-east marshes was found on four days of the tour at Cape May Point as well as Dennis Creek WMA, seemingly at home in fresh, brackish and saltwater environments.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*— close views of this elegant dabbling duck made a big impression at Lighthouse Pond on the 20th. Present in numbers (c.300) at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca*—daily, with Bunker Pond, Lighthouse Pond and Cape May Meadows being key spots to view them.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* - a flock of about 20 including some stunning males appeared at Cape May Point on the 20th and could be watched at close range on Lighthouse Pond or sometimes in flight from the Hawk Watch Platform. Smaller numbers were seen again at the same spot on the 22nd.

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*— rather scarce, unusually so for mid-late October, with a small flock moving west off Ocean Ave during our beach walk on the 19th, and several south-bound flocks at the Avalon Seawatch on the 21st perhaps totaling 55 birds.

Black Scoter *Melanitta americana* – about 25 south-bound with Surf Scoters at the Avalon Seawatch on the 21st.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* - a single lingered at Bunker and Lighthouse Ponds for most of the week but was often sleeping and sometimes difficult to spot. By contrast, at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st a large flock included several handsome males which could be seen on the wildlife drive.

GREBES: Podicipedidae (1)

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*— seen almost daily with two to six individuals often present on the ponds at Cape May Point.

PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae (2)

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* (1)—frequently seen around Cape May town, the harbor and other built up areas.

Mourning Dove *Zenaidura macroura*—small numbers seen daily in a variety of habitats (beach front dunes for example) but not particularly abundant anywhere on the tour.

CUCKOOS AND ALLIES: CUCULIDAE (1)

Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*— a super spot by David from the Morning Flight Platform on the 23rd. Brief but good views were enjoyed by all.

RAILS, COOTS AND ALLIES: Rallidae (2)

Clapper Rail *Rallus crepitans* — we had a fabulous experience playing hide n' seek with a couple of individuals at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

American Coot *Fulica americana* – one or two individuals arrived at Bunker Pond, Cape May Point on the 20th and remained in the area through the 23rd.

AVOCETS: Recurvirostra (1)

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana* – one of several rarities discovered on this tour, we stumbled across an individual in non-breeding plumage on the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

OYSTERCATCHERS: Haematopodidae (1)

American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*— seen only on the first day of the trip though we did see them very well and in numbers with about 55 in Jarvis Sound on the 19th. Having access to views of this species was one of the more obvious benefits of the 'Birding by Boat' Osprey Cruise.

PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS: Charadriidae (2)

Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*— seen in saltwater habitats on four days of the tour with about 60 in Cape May Harbor being the largest count from aboard the Osprey Boat Cruise on the 19th. In addition, a particularly bright, crisply marked juvenile was at Two Mile Landing on the 22nd.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*— a familiar species to most in our party but not particularly common on this tour with 1 – 12 individuals in scattered locations on five days of the trip. Cape May Point and the Hawk Watch Platform had the most sightings.

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES: Scolopacidae (12)

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*— (LO) one seen by JPS during the Osprey boat cruise on the 19th, remarkably proving to be the only sighting of the week.

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus* - a juvenile molting into first-winter plumage was carefully studied and photographed at Cape May Meadows on the 21st, a rich reward for patiently scanning through the Lesser Yellowlegs and Dunlin flock that it was with.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*— a ‘classic’ shorebird most often found feeding along the shoreline on many of the beaches we visited including right across the Ocean Ave from the Sea Crest Inn.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*— Cape May Harbor and Jake’s Landing had sizeable flocks with the very best views in Jarvis Sound on the Osprey Boat Cruise on the 19th.

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*— small and confiding, we had exceptional views of this yellow-legged ‘peep’ at Cape May Meadows and Two Mile Landing.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*—just the one individual found during the short but sweet shorebird extravaganza at Cape May Meadows on the 21st.

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*—most had migrated through the area by mid-October but a tiny handful were still at Cape May Harbor on the 19th and perhaps some in a large, distant flock of shorebirds at Jake’s Landing on the 20th.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* – notoriously difficult to identify but the call notes are key to separating both dowitcher species and we enjoyed listening to the liquid, rippled call notes of this species directly alongside the sharper ‘keek’ calls of Long-billed on the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the morning of the 21st.

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* – about 10 seen and heard close to the Short-billed Dowitchers at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the morning of the 21st, their clearly audible sharp ‘keek’ calls being diagnostic, clinching the identification.

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*— widespread in small numbers at several freshwater and saltmarsh locations such as Cape May Harbor and Two Mile Landing.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*— seen only at Cape May Meadows on the 21st with a flock of about 25 present.

GULLS AND TERNS: Laridae (9)

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*— a small, dark-mantled gull, widespread and fairly common at virtually all coastal and saline locations, their ‘laughing’ vocals bringing cheer and smiles to many a birding session.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*— rather common and not especially fussy about the choice of habitat; beach sites, harbors, roof tops, parking lots.....

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*—ubiquitous, all over Coastal Cape May.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*—once a rarity in the USA, this species has become increasingly common and appears to stage at several locations along the East Coast including Cape May. By way of example, we saw a dozen on our first walk of the trip, right across the street from the Sea Crest Inn! This is an Old World species with all of our birds being identified as the NW European subspecies *L.f.graellsii*, now suspected of undergoing a major range expansion and perhaps breeding in undiscovered colonies in Atlantic Canada.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*— a brutish and aggressive gull closely associated with saltwater habitats at this time of year. Seen on about five days of the trip including close to, or even perched on, the Sea Crest Inn.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*—this cosmopolitan species is one of the largest terns in the world and purely migratory on the Cape May peninsula. Small numbers were present in Cape May Harbor on the 19th and a larger flock, about 30, resting on islands in the impoundments at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

Forster’s Tern *Sterna forsteri*—a beautiful tern observed up close on the Osprey Boat Cruise on the 19th, and again from the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus*—exclusively coastal, seen commuting to and from roosting sites in moderate numbers along the Cape May beaches.

Black Skimmer *Rhynchops niger*— recorded on just the one day, the 19th, with a flock of 55 individuals in resting and flying over the beach right across from the Sea Crest Inn at first light – immaculate!

LOONS: Gaviidae (1)

Common Loon *Gavia immer*— we only saw one loon on the water during the tour but we did see it very well in Jarvis Sound from the Osprey on the 19th. A loose flock of five also flew west over Beach Plum Farm on the 24th.

GANNETS AND BOOBIES: Sulidae (1)

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*— a little distant perhaps, but with a bit of effort we did manage to scope out four individuals from the Avalon Sea Watch on the 21st.

ANHINGAS: Anhingidae (1)

Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga* – we were at Beach Plum Farm on the 23rd when Rick received a text alert stating “*Anhinga over the Beanery!*” – we were only a mile (as the Anhinga flies) from the Beanery!! Simultaneously, 12 pairs of eyes looked skyward and after a couple of false alarms we had our quarry in view and the magnificent beast then spent some time soaring and careening about the sky with Turkey Vultures, Broad-winged and Cooper’s Hawks before disappearing towards Delaware Bay. About an hour later what had to be the same bird was soaring right over Cape May Lighthouse and the Hawk Watch Platform putting on the most fantastic show for the hundreds of fortunate birders present at Cape May. Although New Jersey has amassed over 20 state records almost all of them fall between April and July with late autumn records being truly exceptional.

CORMORANTS: Phalacrocoracidae (2)

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*—with a very limited range in North America, this large cormorant is restricted to the rugged marine environs of the Atlantic Coast. We found two on the outer jetty of the Cape May Inlet from the Osprey on the 19th and Maria quite brilliantly photographed another as it flew past the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach on the 20th. Though not a true rarity it was certainly one of the most range-restricted species seen on the tour.

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*— strings, ribbons and ‘V’ formations of migratory cormorants heading south were observed on each day of the tour with hundreds pouring through between the 21st and 23rd. This was among the most visible and obvious of diurnal migrants to be seen at Cape May.

HERONS AND EGRETS: Ardeidae (6)

American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus* – a remarkable find by Maria who first spotted one in reeds before it flushed up for the entire group during the Osprey boat cruise on the 19th and another, also watched in flight over reeds, was seen on the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*— a wide scatter of feeding birds at several fresh and saltwater locations but during the course week we also witnessed multiple flocks of 6 – 15 migrants heading south over Cape May Point crossing Delaware Bay in dramatic fashion.

Great Egret *Egretta alba*— daily fare, found at many sites on the Cape May peninsula plus several migrating flocks seen from and over Cape May Point during the course of the week.

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*—far less widespread than its larger cousin but seen well and in good numbers from the Osprey Boat Cruise on the 19th, and especially at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor*—nice views of a migrating individual from the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach on the 23rd. It was heading south way out over Delaware Bay but beautifully illuminated by the rising sun.

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*—about five adults roosting in Eastern Red Cedars off the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st. Otherwise, it was puzzlingly scarce in Cape May Harbor with just two seen during the Osprey Boat Cruise on the 19th.

IBIS AND SPOONBILLS: Threskiornithidae (2)

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus*— formerly a New Jersey rarity, we enjoyed this southern species on three days of the tour, all of them at Cape May Point and all of them in flight, usually right in front of or over the Hawk Watch Platform. The largest flock was of seven birds on the 19th.

Glossy Ibis *Pelgadis falcinellus* – just the one observed during the week, on the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

NEW WORLD VULTURES: Cathartidae (2)

Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*— noted daily with 6 – 45 recorded at multiple sites but most frequently from the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*— seen daily with 15 – 300 at numerous sites but most spectacularly concentrated at Cape May Point.

OSPREY: Pandionidae (1)

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*—daily, best viewed from the Hawk Watch Platform where close passing migrants provided a treat for all, especially the photographers. One of the more frequently seen raptors on the tour though we never encountered them in truly large numbers with 10 individuals on the 19th being the most on any given day.

HAWKS, KITES AND EAGLES: Accipitridae (8)

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* – to be have been on a Cape May tour with just one sighting of a Golden Eagle would have been a triumph. To have been on a tour with more than three sightings was just too good to be true! This awe-inspiring raptor graced our notebooks on the 19th, 22nd and 23rd. All of them were hatching-year birds showing large patches of white in the flight feathers and at the base of the tail. The Hawk Watch Platform provided pretty good views on the 19th and 22nd but we could hardly believe our luck on the 23rd when the closest raptor of the day at Beach Plum Farm was an immature Golden Eagle soaring just above tree-top height – Wow!!

Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus*— seen daily, these majestic long-winged raptors were busy and active throughout the week and could often be seen harassing ducks and shorebirds right in from of the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point. We also watched migrants way out over the ocean and Delaware Bay – very cool to see such migration in action!

Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus*— where ever we happened to be ‘Sharpies’ seemed to be actively migrating or hunting. The 22nd and 23rd saw the biggest movements with 45 – 55 seen on both days, mostly over Cape May Point.

Cooper’s Hawk *Accipiter cooperii*—not nearly so common as Sharp-shinned Hawk but still encountered on a daily basis, just about all of them being brown, streaky hatching-year birds.

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*—this magnificent species was one of the more frequently encountered raptors of the trip and recorded almost every day. The Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point was *the* place to see, study and photograph them with up to 15 noted on the 21st. We also had a great deal of luck at Higbee Beach with several close-passing adults seen from the Morning Flight Platform.

Red-shouldered Hawk *Buteo lineatus* – an unobtrusive *buteo* recorded on four days of the tour with about 12 on the 19th being the largest number. Cape May Point was easily the best location to pick them out by the all-important field marks such as the unique translucent crescent across the outer primaries found on adults and immatures alike. A species sometimes overlooked during larger raptor movements.

Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus* – though well past the late September peak for this small, highly migratory *buteo*, we enjoyed watching them from the Hawk Watch Platform on four days of the tour with at least 25 over Cape May Point on the 19th.

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*—daily with two to six individuals in the first half of the tour but a notable increase in migrants on the 22nd and 23rd when up to 12 were seen with other migrant raptors at Cape May Point.

KINGFISHERS: Alcedinidae (1)

Belted Kingfisher *Megasceryle alcyon*—one or two at fresh, brackish and salt water sites - never common and always a thrill to see.

WOODPECKERS: Picidae (5)

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*—good views of this distinctive, highly migratory woodpecker at the Northwood Center (CMBO), Higbee Beach and the woodland near Jake’s Landing. All were singles and all occurred in the early days of the trip on the 19th and 20th.

Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus*—a solid showing of this species, found on five days of the tour including five (probable) migrants from the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach on the 23rd.

Downy Woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens* – surprisingly scarce. A pair found in the woodland near Jake’s Landing on the 20th and another seen briefly at Beach Plum Farm on the 23rd.

Hairy Woodpecker *Dryobates villosus* – one seen by Rick and some of the group at the Northwood Center (CMBO), and a pair showed reasonably well in the woodland near Jake’s Landing on the 20th

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*— perhaps the most visible of the woodpeckers on the tour. We had several ‘pulses’ of migrants on the 19th and 20th at Cape May Point totaling up to 55 individuals including an individual skimming low over the waves before arriving at the beach in front of our hotel on the very first morning of the tour.

FALCONS AND CARACARAS: Falconidae (3)

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*—unexpectedly scarce, perhaps worryingly so, with only 1 – 3 individuals recorded on four days at Cape May Point and Higbee Beach.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*— the common small falcon of the tour being seen each and every day, especially from the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point where we marveled at many close individuals passing right over the assembled birders below. Fifteen to twenty Merlins were seen daily between the 18th and 20th after which the numbers tapered slightly.
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*—rather scarce at the migration watch points being found on just four days of the tour, but a pair roosting on one of the channel markers in Cape May Harbor on the 19th was absolute treat...and they were well photographed!

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: Tyrannidae (2)

Vermilion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus* – a single individual, evidently an immature male, arrived from the north and perched in leafless trees right next to the Morning Flight Platform on the 23rd. It was a stunning bird preceded seconds earlier by a cry of “**Vermilion Flycatcher!!**” from the official counters standing on the Higbee Beach dike! Our entire Naturalist Journeys group was already in place and literally ‘gifted’ one of the rarest birds in the state, a bird which proceeded to perform and catch flies right in front of us for the next 15 minutes or so before moving off towards the beach and out of sight. Around us, near pandemonium ensued as the text message alert system went into overdrive and car loads of excited birders arrived along the dirt road at Higbee Beach to chase this great rarity. Apparently it stuck around for further twenty minutes or so before disappearing and was truly one of those “*there’s no place like Cape May*” moments. About the sixth state record if accepted by the New Jersey Bird Records Committee.

Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe*—not at all common with a few individuals at Higbee Beach WMA, alongside the Morning Flight Platform, and at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR.

VIREOS: Vireonidae (1)

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*— evidently getting late for vireos with just the one individual found foraging near the Northwood Center, CMBO on the 19th.

CROWS AND JAYS: Corvidae (3)

Blue Jay *Cyanocitta cristata*— daily, with up to 35 migrating in small flocks passing over Cape May Point in the early part of the tour but rather fewer over the last two days of the trip.

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*—fairly common, though not found in the same concentrations as Fish Crow.

Fish Crow *Corvus ossifragus*—large numbers around the docking area for the Osprey and Cape May Harbor on three dates during the week. The only *corvid* found in concentrated flocks, sometimes consisting of up to 45 individuals. Best identified by their nasal, almost comical ‘caw’ or ‘caw-caw’; calls.

TITS AND CHICKADEES: Paridae (2)

Carolina Chickadee *Poecile carolinensis*— seen well on the 20th with a couple of pairs along the entrance roads to Cooks Beach and Jake’s Landing. Otherwise limited mostly to heard-only observations on the 21st and the 23rd.

Tufted Titmouse *Baeolophus bicolor* – similar to Carolina Chickadee with very small numbers found in the woodlands near Cooks Beach, Jake’s Landing, Edwin B. Forsythe NWR and Beach Plum Farm.

LARKS: Alaudidae (1)

Horned Lark *Eromophila alpestris* – a single calling bird flew over Beach Plum Farm on the 23rd but with an Anhinga and a Golden Eagle seen at the same venue, the lark was almost unnoticed.....

SWALLOWS AND MARTINS: Hirundinidae (2)

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* – up to 10 frequented Bunker Pond at Cape May Point on the 19th and 20th and provided fine field comparisons with the dozens of Tree Swallows present at the same site.

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*—one of the most visible and obvious migrants of the entire tour. Hundreds, sometimes thousands, of these delightful swallows could be seen pouring west along Ocean Ave and over Cape May town as well as at the more established watch points such as the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point.

KINGLETS: Regulidae (2)

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*— often at arm’s length in the Eastern Red Cedars at Cape May Point where up to 15 could be found during our visits. We really couldn’t have wished for better views and some of our party got perfectly adequate photos and videos using smart phones!

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*—not nearly as frequent as Golden-crowned Kinglet, but recorded at various spots around Cape May Island on four days of the tour with a maximum of six on the 23rd.

NUTHATCHES: Sittidae (2)

Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis*—not a flight year for this irruptive species, we worked hard to obtain satisfactory views of a single individual in the Pines near Jake's Landing on the 20th.

White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis*—fabulous views of a single at the entrance area of Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

TREECREEPERS: Certhiidae (1)

Brown Creeper *Certhia americana*— what an excellent trip we had for creepers! After close views of one at the Northwood Center on the 19th we found other singles at Cape May Point, Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, Higbee Beach (Morning Flight Platform) and Beach Plum Farm. We couldn't have timed our visit better to see this smart, cryptic species in migration.

WRENS: Troglodytidae (1)

Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus*—recorded on each day of the tour, usually detected by its loud, distinctive vocalizations. We had excellent views during the week especially from the Hawk Watch and Morning Flight Platforms.

STARLINGS AND MYNAS: Sturnidae (1)

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (1) — daily, and in a wide variety of habitats with some flocks passing Cape May Lighthouse as if migrating.

MOCKINGBIRDS AND THRASHERS: Mimidae (3)

Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*— the scrub and thickets of Cape May seemed ideal for catbirds but we actually struggled to see or hear them. It wasn't until the end of the tour that we had good looks at several from the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach and at Beach Plum Farm. The third week of October was already past the peak of migration for catbirds.

Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*— fantastic views of two, maybe three thrashers in crisp autumnal sunshine at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st and another at Higbee Beach WMA on the 22nd.

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*— though not found in large numbers, mockingbirds proved to be fairly common at Cape May being found a wide variety of habitats on every day of the tour.

THRUSHES: Turdidae (4)

Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis* – wonderful views of up to a dozen or so at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st and a small flock of 4 migrants moving past the Morning Flight Platform on the 23rd.

Gray-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus* – at least half the group were fortunate to connect with a late migrant at Northwood Center (CMBO) on the 19th.

Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus* – after being missed all week about three individuals were seen during the fabulous birding session at Beach Plum Farm on the 23rd.

American Robin *Turdus migratorius* – rather scarce and a little early in the season for the larger flights. We found nice concentrations of feeding migrants at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st and at Higbee Beach WMA on the 22nd.

WAXWINGS: Bombycillidae (1)

Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*—a tight, fasting moving flock of 15 flew over the Hawk Watch Platform on the 20th.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS: Passeridae (1)

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (1)—often present in built up areas and always present off the Hawk Watch Platform with a resident flock free-loading from the bird seed presumably intended for the native sparrows!

PIPITS AND WAGTAILS: Motacillidae (1)

American Pipit *Anthus rubescens* (LO) —a couple of calling individuals flew over the saltmarshes at Two Mile Landing but, alas, they were seen/heard only by JPS but we were quite busy with skulking sparrows at the time!

FINCHES: Fringillidae (3)

House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus* – a smattering of flyover migrants at the Hawk Watch and Morning Flight Platforms on four days of the tour plus very good views of up to 10 at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st

Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus* – a single individual flew over and circled the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach on the 20th giving diagnostic, wheezy 'dzweee' call notes.

American Goldfinch *Spinus tristis*—puzzlingly scarce with just six noted around Bunker Pond at Cape May Point on the 19th, and one heard at Beach Plum Farm on the 23rd.

NEW WORLD SPARROWS: Passerellidae (12)

Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*— rather scarce but we did find small handfuls around the Eastern Red Cedars at Cape May Point on the 19th and at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla* – single individuals of this small, unobtrusive *spizella* were noted at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st and at Cape May Point on the 22nd.

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*—scarce with just a handful seen at the Morning Flight Platform on the 20th and the 23rd. Our tour was still early season for juncos and more would be expected later in the fall.

White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys* – we had to wait until the last full field day to see this large, elegant sparrow when three immatures were found with White-throated Sparrows on the edge of the parking lot at Cape May Point on the 23rd.

White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis*—daily, a common migrant with the excellent views obtained at multiple sites but probably the most enjoyable when we watched several drinking and bathing in puddles along the road to Cooks Beach on the 20th.

Nelson's Sparrow *Ammospiza nelsoni*—At least four, possibly as many as six, well seen (with some patience) at Two Mile Landing on the 22nd. All but one showed characteristics of the interior forms (*A. n. nelson/altera*) with a single, washed-out, paler individual showing characteristics of the coastal Atlantic subspecies (*A. n. subvirgata*).

Seaside Sparrow *Ammospiza maritima*— a single popped up in the *spartina* during a stellar sparrow watching session at Two Mile Landing on the 22nd and was in view long enough to be photographed.

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*— relatively scarce with the first really good views along the road to Jake's Landing on the 20th and along the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*— commonly seen in a wide variety of habitats but with notable arrivals of migrants on the 19th along the dunes at Ocean Ave and along the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st.

Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolni*— excellent views of one, possibly two, directly below the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach on the 23rd.

Swamp Sparrow *Melospiza georgiana*— tricky and difficult to see well but we did eventually have excellent views at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 21st with further single migrants at Higbee Beach and Beach Plum Farm on the 23rd.

Eastern Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*— rather scarce with a single at the Northwood Center, CMBO on the 19th and one or two that showed reasonably well at the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach on the 23rd.

NEW WORLD BLACKBIRDS: Icteridae (4)

Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna*—single individuals were seen at Jake's Landing and Edwin B. Forsythe NWR but we also witnessed some migration of this species at Cape May Point on the 19th and 22nd plus a sizeable flock of 8 at Higbee Beach WMA on the 22nd.

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*— daily, with some larger scale westward movements seen over the beach and dunes along Ocean Ave close to the Sea Crest Inn. Frequently encountered around Cape May Point as well.

Common Grackle *Quiscalus quisqualis* – casual observations of several flying across the freeway south of Philadelphia on the 18th. Remarkably these ended up being the only sightings for the entire tour.

Boat-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus major*— small flocks found around the saltmarshes on four days of the tour including Cape May Harbor, Cook's Beach, Edwin B. Forsythe NWR and Two Mile Landing with a male singing and displaying vigorously at the latter site on the 22nd.

NEW WORLD WARBLERS: Parulidae (7)

Black-and-white Warbler *Miniotilta varia* – a single appeared during a magical hour for passerines at Northwood Center, CMBO on the 19th.

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*—surprisingly scarce with just a single at Beach Plum Farm on the 23rd.

Cape May Warbler *Setophaga tigrina* – two or three relatively bright individuals graced the Eastern Red Cedars in front of the Hawk Watch Platform on the evening of the 18th giving the most fabulous start to the tour – Cape May Warblers in Cape May within our first hour of birding – not too shabby!

Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata*—we were treated to two bright first-winter birds on the first evening. They were feeding in the cedars right in front of the Hawk Watch Platform, and we had more excellent views at Beach Plum Farm on the 23rd. Otherwise this species was seen and heard at the Morning Flight Platform on the 20th and 23rd.

Palm Warbler *Setophaga palmarum*—scarce with a couple seen well at Jake's Landing on the 20th and one at Higbee Beach on the 23rd.

Pine Warbler *Setophaga pinus* – a male was spotted by Ellen as it dropped in briefly by the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach on the 20th. Identifiable record shots were obtained by JPS. This was one of the scarcer warbler species to be seen at the Morning Flight.

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata*—often abundant with migrants turning up at almost every site in Cape May including on the lawns or in the cedars around the built up areas of town, but also impressive ‘waves’ of migrants moving west through the dunes along Ocean Ave near our hotel. Conservative estimates included 3000 on the 19th and about 2000 on the 20th but after that numbers did appear to drop fairly dramatically. One of the key songbird species to be observed in mass migration at Cape May in mid to late October.

CARDINAL, GROSBEAKS, AND ALLIES: Cardinalidae (2)

Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*—widespread but in very small numbers in scrub and thickets with the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach being an especially good spot to see them.

Dickcissel *Spiza americana* – a single flew overhead at Higbee Beach WMA on the 22nd. It might have passed unnoticed had it not been giving its ultra-distinctive electric, flatulent flight call.

Other fauna

During the course of the week we came across five species of mammal; **Eastern Cottontail**, **Eastern Gray Squirrel**, **Muskrat**, **Common Bottlenose Dolphin** and **White-tailed Deer**, and **Snapping Turtle** and **Green Frog** were among the reptiles identified. But, the last word must go to the migrating **Monarchs** that we enjoyed so much and a species for which Cape May is justly famed. Every day they could be seen migrating over towns, woods, dunes, beaches and even the open ocean, and who could forget the roosting/staging of thousands of **Monarchs** in the **Pines** at the end of Coral Ave on Cape May Point!