

Cape May: Fall Migration | Species List

October 10 – 16, 2023 | with Naturalist Journeys



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

Compiled by James P. Smith



Summary

True to form, Cape May in the fall duly delivered a most excellent birding experience. Our visit in the second week of October gave more than just a taste of 'Cape May magic'. After a couple of uncomfortably warm days to the start the tour, the wind swung around to the north and we had the great fortune to witness a massive migration of land-bird species at Higbee Beach WMA. That day, October 13th, the staff from the CMBO logged a mind-boggling 77,000 migrants....and we just happened to be in the right place at the right time to enjoy it! In addition, a smattering of rare and scarce species included an Eared Grebe, a fine male Eurasian Wigeon, a juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker and a couple of skulking Winter Wrens. Rick Weiman's tireless work behind the scenes greatly enhanced this trip as did the group camaraderie and humor throughout the tour. Thank you all for the making the trip so enjoyable.

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

DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS: Anatidae (18)

Brant *Branta bernicula* – several small flocks of ‘Atlantic’ Brant (*B. b. hrota*) were observed in the crisp morning light at the Avalon Seawatch on the 15th.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*— small numbers and migrating skeins were noted on most days of the tour, most frequently from the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* (1) — daily on the freshwater pools around Cape May Point State Park, especially Bunker Pond. Plus good numbers at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR.

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*— up to half-a-dozen seen from the ponds at Cape May Point State Park and Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on two days and most certainly one of the most attractive ducks seen on the tour.

Blue-winged Teal *Spatula discors*— up to a dozen recorded on at least four days, at Cape May Point State Park and Edwin B. Forsythe NWR .

Northern Shoveler *Spatulata clypeata* – a nice concentration at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th when at least 15 were present.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera* – regularly found at Cape May Point State Park, Bunker and Lighthouse Ponds hosting good numbers with some of them at close range just off the boardwalk.

American Wigeon *Mareca americana* – often present in the wetlands at Cape May Point as well as being seen in good numbers at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR.

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope* – a fine male of this Old World species routinely graced Bunker Pond just in front of the Hawk Watch platform and was noted on four days of the trip.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*— small flocks at the ponds around Cape May Point, South Cape May Meadows, and other wetland locations throughout the tour.

American Black Duck *Anas rubripes*—this discrete resident was found on five days especially at Cape May Point but also from the Revolution Rail Trail on the 11th and the drive loop at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*— an elegant dabbling duck found daily at Cape May Point as well as in numbers at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th.

Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca*—small numbers frequently present at Bunker Pond, Lighthouse Pond and Cape May Meadows on five days of the trip.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* – a lone female lingered with Mallards at Bunker Pond and was seen from the Hawk Watch Platform on at least four days.

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*— rather scarce with south-bound birds only noted at the Avalon Seawatch on the 12th (5) and the 15th (2).

Black Scoter *Melanitta americana* – a single off Beach Ave on the first morning was followed by south-bound and north-bound flocks at the Avalon Seawatch on the 12th (45) and the 15th (65).

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullates* – a juvenile showed pretty well on a small pond at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* – a good tour for this species with small flocks lingering at Bunker and Lighthouse Ponds for most of the week and an impressive gathering at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th when about 130 were seen.

GREBES: Podicipedidae (2)

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

Eared Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* – this local rarity caused quite a stir when it first arrived. Present at Bunker Pond, Cape May Point throughout most of our week though was sometimes difficult to see but eventually came quite close to the Hawk Watch platform offering good views.

PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae (2)

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* (1)—frequent around Cape May town, the harbor and other built up areas including the roof of the Sea Crest Inn!

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*—found daily in a variety of habitats though not abundant anywhere and easily overlooked.

SWIFTS : Apodidae (1)

Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica* – a party of four moved south over the Hawk Watch platform at Cape May Point on the 15th. Getting late for this summer migrant and a little surprising to see this late in the year.

RAILS, COOTS AND ALLIES: Rallidae (3)

Clapper Rail *Rallus crepitans* —several heard and one actually seen flying across a salt water channel at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th with several more heard calling in the rain at Wetlands Institute on the 14th.

Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata* – a series of sightings at Bunker Pond, Cape May Point over the last three days of the tour, mostly singles but an amazing eight together (!!) on the 15th after they were pushed out of the reeds by a Northern Harrier.

American Coot *Fulica americana* – fairly frequent at Bunker Pond, Cape May Point State Park and also seen at Lighthouse Pond and Edwin B. Forsythe NWR.

OYSTERCATCHERS: Haematopodidae (1)

American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*— about 45 in Jarvis Sound on the 13th seen very well during the Osprey Boat Cruise with other flocks observed from the Avalon Seawatch on the 12th (11) and the 15th (6).

PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS: Charadriidae (3)

Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*— seen well on three days with about 20 in Cape May Harbor being the largest count from the Osprey Boat Cruise on the 13th plus several others at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th and the Wetlands Institute off Stone Harbor Blvd on the 14th.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*— decidedly scarce with only one confirmed observation for the group, one flying south over Higbee Beach WMA on the 14th.

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* – an excellent showing of this highly migratory species with especially good views of flocks sheltering under the seawall at the Avalon Seawatch. Up to 25 were noted on three days.

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES: Scolopacidae (12)

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*— wonderfully close views of up to 10 during the Osprey boat cruise on the 13th, and others resting along the seawall at Avalon on the 12th and the 15th.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*— easily the most frequently seen shorebird of the week, often feeding along the shoreline at several of the beaches but especially the Avalon Seawatch where we enjoyed close range views.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*— Cape May Harbor hosted some nice flocks with excellent views from aboard the Osprey on the 13th. Others were seen very well among the Sanderling flocks at Avalon.

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*— a small, yellow-legged ‘peep’ noted on just one day of the tour, at Avalon on the 15th.

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*— we enjoyed some excellent close-up views of this ‘peep’ at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th and particularly at the Avalon Seawatch on the 12th and 15th.

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* – some welcome studies of this tricky species directly alongside Semipalmated Sandpipers, Sanderling and Dunlin. Singles noted at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR and the Avalon Seawall, all were adults in non-breeding plumage.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* – good numbers (c.45) resting along the Cold Spring Jetty on the 13th and seen from aboard the Osprey.

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* – careful scope studies of a single bird at South Cape May Meadows on the 15th.

Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata* – a surprise single flew over the berm and saltmarsh at the Wetlands Institute on the 14th.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* – nice views of a single working an exposed mud embankment in Jarvis Sound on the 13th, seen from the Osprey boat cruise.

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*— some fairly large flocks (c.165) resting at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th, with much smaller numbers found in Jarvis Sound and the Wetlands Institute.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*— found only on our visits to Edwin B. Forsythe NWR and Cape May Meadows with up to six at each location.

GULLS AND TERNS: Laridae (10)

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*— widespread and fairly common at coastal and saltwater locations, their 'laughing' calls bringing cheer to our birding sessions including a couple of especially tame birds at the Cape May Hawk Watch. The largest numbers though, were seen at the Avalon Seawatch.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*— not especially common on this year's tour with 2 – 6 noted at a variety of beaches, harbors, roof tops, and parking lots but perhaps most easily seen right across the street from the Sea Crest Inn.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*— after being puzzlingly missed on the first day of the tour this ubiquitous species was noted all over the Cape May peninsula, particularly at the Wetlands Institute and Avalon.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*—increasingly common in recent years, we saw a dozen or more on our very first walk of the trip, right across the street from the Sea Crest Inn. An Old World species with all of our adult birds identified as the NW European subspecies *L.f.graellsii*, and currently undergoing a major range expansion suspected of breeding in undiscovered colonies in Canada. We also found a few at the Avalon Seawatch and bathing at Bunker Pond in front of the Hawk Watch platform.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*— this brute of a gull was seen in small numbers on six days of the trip, most frequently around Cape May Island itself.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*—one of the largest terns in the world and purely migratory along the Cape May peninsula. A large flock, about 30, was present in the impoundments at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th and we enjoyed others in flight at Cape May harbor and especially at the Avalon Seawatch.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* – several large flocks of 'sterna' terns passing south off Beach Ave on the 11th and the Avalon Seawatch on the 15th were very probably this species but just a little too far offshore to be absolutely certain of the identification.

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*— exquisite views of this beautiful tern on the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th and again on the Osprey Boat Cruise on the 13th.

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus*— good numbers commuting along the Cape May and Avalon beaches, another species undergoing a range expansion and now breeding successfully on Horseshoe Island in coastal New Jersey.

Black Skimmer *Rhynchops niger*— most easily found on and over the beach right across from the Sea Crest Inn, especially at first light and again the evening. Much like the Royal Tern, this species has benefitted from the protection of Horseshoe Island, NJ as a breeding site. This year we saw flocks of up to 300 birds – amazing!

CORMORANTS: Phalacrocoracidae (2)

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*— a large bulky cormorant restricted to the rugged shores of the mid-Atlantic Coast. We enjoyed excellent views of five from the Osprey on the 13th resting along the Cold Spring Jetty and, from a North American perspective, this one of the more range-restricted species seen on the tour.

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*— steady flights and 'V' formations of migrant cormorants were observed heading south on most days of the tour, the largest numbers being seen on the 13th when over 250 were counted.

LOONS: Gaviidae (1)

Common Loon *Gavia immer*— high flying Common Loons were noted on three dates, all of them over or close to the ocean including one right over the Sea Crest Inn on the 14th!

GANNETS AND BOOBIES: Sulidae (1)

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*— these were a little distant but with some effort we did manage to scope four or more individuals from the Avalon Sea Watch on the 15th.

PELICANS: Pelicanidae (1)

Brown Pelican *Pelicanus occidentalis* – an excellent tour for seeing this species with birds noted on four dates along the coast including 8 along Cold Spring Inlet on the 13th and 4 at the Avalon Seawatch on the 15th.

HERONS AND EGRETS: Ardeidae (7)

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*— widely scattered at fresh and saltwater locations with the most impressive numbers at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 13th when about 45 were seen alongside other herons and egrets.

Great Egret *Egretta alba*— found daily along the Cape May peninsula as well as the impressive concentrations that graced Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*—far less common than Great Egret but still rather widespread with the most (c.10) at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th.

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* – an adult, albeit distant and brief, brought some cheer to a rainy afternoon at the Wetlands institute on the 14th.

Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor*—distant but perfectly acceptable views of two individuals in flight in the rain at the Wetlands institute on the 14th.

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*—as many as 25 roosting in Eastern Red Cedars off the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th with others seen at Bunker Pond, Cape May State Park and another roost of about 9 in Cedars seen from aboard the Osprey on the 13th.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea* – two individuals, both juveniles, were close to the Black-crowned Night-Heron roost in Cape May Harbor on the 13th rounding out an excellent selection of herons seen on this year's tour.

IBIS AND SPOONBILLS: Threskiornithidae (2)

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus*— formerly a great rarity in NJ, we enjoyed this southern wader on three days of the tour including an impressive flock of c.45 in flight at Cape May Point State Park on the 13th right in front of the Hawk Watch Platform. Smaller groups were noted over Garrett Family Preserve and at South Cape May Meadows.

Glossy Ibis *Pelgadis falcinellus* – two among the mass of egrets on the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th.

NEW WORLD VULTURES: Cathartidae (2)

Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*— recorded on four days of the tour, most frequently from the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*— noted daily with 5 – 60 at many sites but easily the biggest concentrations were seen over Cape May Point State Park.

OSPREY: Pandionidae (1)

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*— best viewed from the Hawk Watch Platform and one of the most frequently seen raptors on the tour with up to a dozen each day. Moreover, this was Dave's favorite bird of the trip!

HAWKS, KITES AND EAGLES: Accipitridae (7)

Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus*—noted on four days, usually around wetlands and especially towards the end of the week where several could be seen 'harrying' waterfowl right in front of the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point. The 15th was the best day for these majestic raptors with at least nine seen including a couple of gray males from the Hawk Watch platform.

Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus*— a small, perky migrant raptor seen just about anywhere with 10 – 55 observed daily.

Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii*— less numerous than Sharp-shinned Hawk but still observed on a daily basis, including a close-up encounter with an especially feisty juvenile male at the Banding Demo at Cape May Point State Park on the 14th.

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*—the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point was *the* place to see and watch this magnificent raptor with up to 12 noted on the 11th and the 13th plus we had immaculate views at Higbee Beach with several close-passing adults right over the Morning Flight Platform!

Red-shouldered Hawk *Buteo lineatus* – this unobtrusive *buteo* slipped by almost unnoticed on two dates, at Beach Plum Farm on the 11th and Higbee Beach WMA on the 14th. The unique translucent crescent across the outer primaries helped to sort them from the much more frequent Broad-winged Hawks at this time of year.

Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus* – a small, highly migratory *buteo*, watched from the Hawk Watch Platform and over South Cape May Meadows on three days with at least 12 over Cape May Point/Cape May Meadows on the 15th.

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*— noted daily with two to five individuals, most frequently from Cape May Point State Park.

KINGFISHERS: Alcedinidae (1)

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*— a good tour for this species with birds being seen every day at a variety of fresh, brackish and salt water sites but most consistently from the Hawk Watch Platform.

WOODPECKERS: Picidae (6)

Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus* – a handsome juvenile flew past the Hawk Watch Platform, another species caught up in the mega migration day of October 13th!

Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus*—a modest showing of this species with no obvious migration movements this year. Birds were enjoyed on three days at Higbee Beach WMA, Edwin B. Forsythe NWR and Sea Grove Ave.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*— Rick noted sapsucker holes in a birch at the Northwood Center (CMBO) and predicted that a sapsucker would fly in...and so it did! We treated to wonderful views and if that wasn't enough the same bird was joined by a Cape May Warbler also enjoying the running sap! In addition, migrating sapsuckers were seen at Higbee Beach WMA and over the dunes at the Avalon Seawatch.

Downy Woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens* – rather scarce with one or two noted on just three days with the best views at Higbee Beach WMA.

Hairy Woodpecker *Dryobates villosus* – two at the Northwood center (CMBO) on the 11th showed reasonably well and one was heard calling near the Visitor Center at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th.

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*— the most visible migrant woodpecker of the tour and one of the most abundant migrants on the big migration day of October 13th. We enjoyed 'pulses and surges' of migrants from the Morning Flight platform and estimated over 130 in just a couple of hours but the official tally for the morning from CMBO staff was 667!

FALCONS AND CARACARAS: Falconidae (3)

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*— small numbers passed over the Hawk Watch on most of our visits but northerly winds on the 15th produced a decent flight when about 25 passed by, several of them close.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*— the most common small falcon on tour being seen on five days, most frequently from the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point. Many close individuals passed right over the assembled birders allowing for fantastic studies and great comparisons with American Kestrels.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*—fairly scarce on migration this year being found on just four days of the tour though we did see them very well from the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point State Park with up to ten moving south over the dunes and parking lot on the first afternoon of the trip.

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: Tyrannidae (1)

Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe*— a nice flight seen from the Morning Flight Platform on the big migration day of October 13th plus good views along the hedgerows at Higbee Beach WMA and at Seagrove Ave.

VIREOS: Vireonidae (2)

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*— vireos were scarce on the tour, evidently getting a bit late for them, but we did have good views of this species at the Northwood Center, CMBO on the 11th and at Sea Grove Ave on the 13th.

Blue-headed Vireo *Vireo solitarius* – this distinctive ‘spectacled’ vireo landed briefly by the Morning Flight Platform on the 13th followed by two seen well along the hedgerows of Higbee Beach WMA the next day.

CROWS AND JAYS: Corvidae (3)

Blue Jay *Cyanocitta cristata*— evidently not a flight year with 2 – 12 noted on just four days of the tour.

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*— fairly common throughout the Cape May peninsula.

Fish Crow *Corvus ossifragus*— fairly large numbers around Cape May on three dates during the week, some flocks consisting of up to 45 individuals. Most easily identified by the nasal, near-comical ‘caw’ or ‘caw-caw’ calls.

TITS AND CHICKADEES: Paridae (2)

Carolina Chickadee *Poecile carolinensis*— noted on four days and seen especially well at the Garrett Family Preserve where we came across a feeding flock of about 10.

Tufted Titmouse *Baeolophus bicolor* – small numbers in the woodlands at the Garrett Family Preserve, Edwin B. Forsythe NWR and Higbee Beach WMA.

SWALLOWS AND MARTINS: Hirundinidae (1)

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*— the only species of swallow seen on this year’s tour, most easily viewed from the Hawk Watch Platform at Cape May Point State Park and South Cape May Meadows with 5 – 250 recorded on four days.

KINGLETS: Regulidae (2)

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*— one of the more obvious migrants during the second half of our week some of them at arm’s length in the Cedars at the Hawk Watch platform and at the Morning Flight on the 13th. Rick even managed to rescue a road casualty, a day on which the official CMBO staff tallied 149 at Higbee Beach WMA!

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*— this charismatic little passerine showed well on three days of the tour with the best views coming from the Wetlands Institute on the 14th. We enjoyed prolonged views of several feeding at close range in *phragmites* and other vegetation around the visitor center.

NUTHATCHES: Sittidae (2)

Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis*— not a flight year for this irruptive species, most of the group heard one at the Morning Flight platform at Higbee Beach on the 13th, but Jean and Jim actually managed to get views before it moved on.

White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis*—fabulous views of a pair around the restrooms and entrance of Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th.

TREECREEPERS: Certhiidae (1)

Brown Creeper *Certhia americana*— Rick suggested we might see a creeper along the wooded trail at Sea Grove Ave and how right he was with a single bird there on the 13th, the only sighting of the whole tour.

WRENS: Troglodytidae (3)

Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus*— one of the most vociferous species, heard everyday though it was quite late into the tour when we finally had excellent views from the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes hiemalis* – one of the less expected migrants on this year’s trip and a real skulker, thus quite difficult to observe. We did especially well to hear and then see one at Higbee Beach WMA on the 14th with another later the same day seen by John around the visitor center at the Wetlands Institute.

Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris* – at least two in the *phragmites* off the first boardwalk at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th. Dave did incredibly well to produce a photograph as the birds were especially challenging to view. And, as if to tragically illustrate the hazards facing migrating birds, one was found freshly dead on the pavement outside the Sea Crest Inn on the big migration day of the 13th.

MOCKINGBIRDS AND THRASHERS: Mimidae (3)

Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*— the Cape May thickets proved ideal for this species and we either heard or saw 2 – 7 individuals on most days.

Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*— we had some fantastic looks at thrashers on this trip; Garrett Family Preserve, Edwin B. Forsythe and at Higbee Beach WMA all produced memorable, prolonged views and photos!

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*— common and widespread along the Cape May peninsula being found in a wide variety of scrubby habitats and seen on most days of the tour.

STARLINGS AND MYNAS: Sturnidae (1)

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (I) — seen daily in a wide variety of habitats with the largest flock of around 150 off Stone Harbor Blvd in the rain on the 14th.

THRUSHES: Turdidae (1)

American Robin *Turdus migratorius* – we watched a few feeding migrants at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th and then enjoyed small flights of 35 and 45 and at Higbee Beach WMA on the 13th and 14th respectively.

WAXWINGS: Bombycillidae (1)

Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*— buzzing, fasting moving flocks passed over the Morning Flight Platform in large numbers on the 13th. We noted about 200 but the official tally for the day by CMBO staff was 881!

OLD WORLD SPARROWS: Passeridae (1)

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (I)—always present at the Hawk Watch Platform with a resident flock working the bird seed intended to attract native sparrows and buntings. And, they were even on the move on the big migration day of October 13th when at least 25 passed right over the Morning Flight platform!

PIPITS AND WAGTAILS: Motacillidae (1)

American Pipit *Anthus rubescens* — several small flocks flew over the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach on the 13th totaling at least 55 birds though they were often difficult to pick out from the masses of Yellow-rumped Warblers. Thankfully the pipits delivered diagnostic call notes whenever they passed over.

FINCHES: Fringillidae (3)

House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus* – quite easy to overlook amid the myriad of other species but we did have good views of up to 7 at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th, along with a tiny handful at the Morning Flight on the 13th and 14th.

Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus* – several flew over the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach on the 13th giving their diagnostic, wheezy ‘zchweee’ calls.

American Goldfinch *Spinus tristis*—rather scarce with up to 8 on three days at the Garret Family Preserve, Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, Higbee Beach and Cape May Point State Park.

NEW WORLD SPARROWS: Passerellidae (8)

Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*— scarce with singles around the Eastern Red Cedars at the Hawk Watch platform at Cape May Point and at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR.

Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla* – this unobtrusive yet subtly attractive *spizella* was noted in small numbers at Cape May Point State Park, Higbee Beach WMA and South Cape May Meadows.

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*—one perched briefly by the Morning Flight Platform on the 13th and proved to be only sighting of the trip.

White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis*— migrants suddenly appeared during the Morning Flight at Higbee Beach on the 13th and at Sea Grove Ave later the same day with excellent views at Higbee Beach WMA and the Wetlands Trust the following day.

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*— relatively scarce with the first really good views along the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th and in front of the Hawk Watch platform at Cape May Point on three dates.

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*— a common sparrow with migrants found in a wide variety of habitats including the dunes of Beach Ave, the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, Sea Grove Ave and the Wetlands Institute. Up to 25 recorded on five days of the trip.

Swamp Sparrow *Melospiza georgiana*— though tricky to observe at times we did eventually have excellent views at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, Higbee Beach WMA and the Wetlands Institute with up to 28 recorded on three days.

Eastern Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*— most often heard giving nasal 'chewink' calls though a few showed reasonably well at the Morning Flight Platform at Higbee Beach on the 13th with another seen briefly at Sea Grove Ave later the same day. Noted on three days of the tour.

NEW WORLD BLACKBIRDS: Icteridae (6)

Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* – a cooperative individual was spotted by Rick on the wildlife drive at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th and remained in scope view for some time.

Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna*— though only seen on one day we actually witnessed a decent migration of this species at Higbee Beach WMA during the major flight on Oct 13th. We tallied about 35 in three small flocks moving high over the platform with waxwings, flickers and Yellow-rumped Warblers!

Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula* – a nice sequence of late migrants with one landing briefly at the entrance of the Garrett Family Preserve on the 11th, several during the major Morning Flight on the 13th and excellent views of one in the Cedars from the Hawk Watch platform at Cape May Point in late afternoon, also on the 13th.

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*— relatively scarce this year with 12 – 45 noted at a variety of wetland sites on four days of the trip.

Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula* – typically scarce in Cape May, we came across just one flock of 8 at the Garrett family Preserve on the 11th.

Boat-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus major*— closely associated with saltmarsh habitat, small flocks were seen on three days of the tour including at Cape May Harbor (from the Osprey), Edwin B. Forsythe NWR and the Wetlands Institute.

NEW WORLD WARBLERS: Parulidae (10)

Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* – two single birds seen briefly but well on two consecutive days; at Higbee Beach Morning Flight on the 13th, and Higbee Beach WMA on the 14th.

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*— a nice showing of yellowthroats with up to five seen on three consecutive days; at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, Higbee Beach WMA and the Wetlands Institute.

American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla* – an immature popped into view along the narrow trails at the Northwood Center (CMBO) on the 11th.

Cape May Warbler *Setophaga tigrina* – wonderful views of a first-winter taking sap from a birch previously drilled by a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and the sapsucker was in attendance and actively working the tree at the same time! At the Northwood Center (CMBO) on the 11th.

Northern Parula *Setophaga americana* – perhaps as many as three at the Northwood Center (CMBO) on the 11th, and other singles at Edwin B. Forsythe on the 12th, Higbee Beach Morning Flight on the 13th and the Wetlands Institute in the rain on the 14th.

Bay-breasted Warbler *Setophaga castanea* – one appeared briefly in the early stages of the Morning Flight on the 13th. Thankfully it settled for long enough to establish the identification, beautifully illuminated in the morning sunshine.

Black-throated Blue Warbler *Setophaga caerulescens* (LO) – three, all of them males on October 13th; one in the *phragmites* by the Morning Flight platform at Higbee Beach and two in the Pitch Pines by the public restrooms at Cape May Point State Park.

Prairie Warbler *Setophaga discolor* – really excellent prolonged views of one at the Northwood Center, CMBO on the 11th in unusually wooded habitat for this species.

Palm Warbler *Setophaga palmarum*— rather scarce and fleeting with a couple seen at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th, one at Higbee Beach on the 13th plus one that flew in from the ocean and over the dunes at the Avalon Seawatch on the 15th.

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata*— one of the key songbird species observed in mass migration at Cape May in mid-to-late October. Though initially scarce in the first two days of the trip, all that changed on October 13th when the wind shifted from warm south-westerlies to cooler northerlies overnight and a weak cold front passed through the region. The result was an extra-ordinary flight of songbirds of which this was the most abundant species. Yellow-rumps passed the Morning Flight platform in surges all morning and we estimated about 10,000 by the time we left around 09:15 am but the official CMBO tally for the day was over 61,400! This was a day to remember and the reason why Cape May is so justly famed for its fall migration.

CARDINAL, GROSBEAKS, AND ALLIES: Cardinalidae (2)

Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*—widespread in small numbers in the scrub and thickets at many sites in Cape May but perhaps easiest to see out in front of the Hawkwatch Platform at Cape May Point.

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* (LO) – one was seen all too briefly by Messer’s Weiman and Smith at the ‘Wood Duck pond’ at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR on the 12th.

MAMMALS

Eastern Cottontail *Sylvilagus floridanus* — sporadic sightings around Cape May, usually hoping down the road.

Eastern Gray Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* — fairly frequent around Cape May with several dark morphs seen in the town.

Common Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* — sometimes seen well at the inshore waters of Avalon and across from the Sea Crest Inn along Beach Ave.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* – one or two distant spouts observed off the beach at Avalon when Jim had the great fortune to be looking out to sea and see a full-scale breach from a Humpback!

White-tailed Deer *Odocoileus virginianus* — quite often seen in the median along the Garden State Parkway as well as briefly at the Garrett Family Preserve.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Pond Slider *Trachemys scripta* – several observed at Bunker Pond, Cape May Point.

Northern Watersnake *Nerodia sipedon* – one at South Cape May Meadows seen Phyllis and Mike on the 15th.

BUTTERFLIES

Pearl Crescent *Phyciodes tharos* – one by the entrance of the Garrett Family Preserve on the 12th.

Monarch *Danaus plexippus* – this, perhaps the most well-known butterfly in North America, was seen on every day of the tour with a steady stream of migrants passing along the beaches, over the ocean and high over the marshes.

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui* – one alighted briefly at South Cape May Meadows on the 15th.