



Cape May Fall Migration Trip Report 2023

[Link: Cape May Fall Migration Trip Report 2023](#)

It was a wonderful week in Cape May. The weather was simply gorgeous, perhaps a little too nice at times, but the sunny skies and nice temperatures made for really pleasant birding conditions. We didn't have any cold fronts that pushed big numbers of migrant songbirds into the area but what was around showed well and made for a great time for our group. Cape May Bird Observatory runs a few different migratory watch sites and we visited all of them over the course of the tour. Our first day was a nice cross selection of birds; we first stopped at the Avalon Seawatch where a fine selection of shorebirds lined up at our feet as willing subjects for an impromptu identification workshop. Trying to separate these similarly looking species of sandpipers can be quite the chore but this flock was delightfully cooperative and really let us get to know them. While we studied our sandpipers we had a few Brown Pelicans, a couple Surf Scoters and several Royal Terns go migrating by, but unfortunately the Cory's Shearwaters the official Counter was observing stayed out on the horizon line, more like a ghost than a tangible sighting. We then headed down to the main counting site, the hawk deck at the Cape May Lighthouse State Park. Raptors were moving and we enjoyed several species in a short time including 70 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 30 American Kestrels and almost 20 Merlins! A couple of Peregrine Falcons flew over as well.



Merlin © Skye Haas

We did quite well for songbirds on this tour, certainly far better than the lack of cold fronts would have suggested. Near daily checks of the Cape May Northwoods Nature Center always yielded something interesting like Yellow-throated and Philadelphia Vireos, Eastern Wood-Pewees, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Scarlet Tanager, the always cheery Carolina Chickadees, and of course several kinds of warblers like Northern Parula, Black-and-White, Blackpoll and Cape May Warblers.



Eastern Wood-Pewee © Skye Haas



Carolina Chickadee © Skye Haas



Yellow-throated Vireo © Skye Haas



Scarlet Tanager © Skye Haas



Cape May Warbler © Skye Haas

One morning, we went to the CMBO's songbird count site where sharp-eyed observers try to record all the passerines moving overhead at dawn. It was a slower day of migration, but still we were marveling at the dozens of Palm Warblers and American Redstarts that kept shooting overhead as a continual parade of Northern Flickers maintained a steady flight northward! One of the amazing natural features of the Cape May region are the extensive salt marshes that lay behind the sandy

barrier islands along the coasts. We had several opportunities to explore this habitat, including by boat when we took a tour on a small flat bottomed craft that allowed us to get up close and personal with the denizens of the marsh. We had some great looks at Clapper Rails as well as Saltmarsh and Seaside Sparrows. Wading birds were well represented with tons of egrets but we also saw some goodies like Tricolored Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and multiple American Bitterns. This trip is just such a fantastic way to spend a morning and everyone was thrilled by the experience!



Clapper Rail © Skye Haas



Saltmarsh Sparrow © Skye Haas



American Bittern © Skye Haas

In addition to the boat tour, there are several coastal refuges we visited that allowed access to large flocks of shorebirds. We were able to get to see and compare some of the dramatic large wading shorebirds like Marbled Godwits, American Oystercatchers and Western Willets as well as more subtle shorebirds like Dunlins, Dowitchers and Yellowlegs.



Western Sandpiper © Skye Haas



Black Skimmers © Kathryn Mills

And of course, no trip to Cape May is complete without a few rarities! We got to enjoy a few different goodies like Great Cormorants, Whimbrel, Parasitic Jaeger, a handsome Eurasian Wigeon and as our last sighting of the trip as we drove off the causeway back onto the Jersey mainland, we sighted a large flock of White Ibis, a recent invader from the deep south!



Great Cormorant © Skye Haas



Whimbrel © Skye Haas



Eurasian Wigeon © Skye Haas