

Cape May Migration Itinerary

[Link: Cape May Migration](#)

Tour Overview

Cape May, found at the southern tip of New Jersey, is one of those legendary locations with a rich birding history and is one of the birdiest places on the eastern seaboard! We'll bird a variety of habitats including salt marshes, brushy woodlots and extensive beaches. Hordes of songbirds migrate through the Cape at this time of year. We will explore various patches where the warblers, sparrows, buntings and other passerines spend the day refueling for their next leg of their migrations.

Overhead swirling flocks of thousands of swallows are commonplace and this tour is timed to hit the peak of the magnificent Peregrine Falcon migration, that has a cult-like following of raptor enthusiasts. This is also a good time to see other raptor species like Osprey, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks and American Kestrels.

Shorebird migration is also at a crescendo at this time of year with the extensive beaches of the Jersey shoreline coated in Black-bellied Plovers, Red Knots, Western Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones.

Other waterbirds are starting to gather at the point with treats like Parasitic Jaegers harassing the terns offshore, Black Skimmers and Royal Terns roosting on the beach, evening flights of egrets and herons over the ocean and the first flocks of Black and Surf Scoters coming down the coasts. And finally Cape May has been the place of many a rarity so who knows what surprise may occur while we are there.

Itinerary

Day 1: Philadelphia



Arrival in Philadelphia. Our Cape May birding tour will kick off in Philadelphia with a meet-and-greet over dinner. Night in Philadelphia.

Day 2: Cape May State Park and Observatory



After breakfast, we will make the two hour drive down to Cape May. We will head right to Cape May State Park and spend some time at the Cape May Bird Observatory's (CMBO) Hawk Deck, as well as wander the coastal woods and marshy meadows. This end-of-the-line habitat often holds good numbers of warblers, sparrows and vireos, while the numerous ponds are often full of ducks like Blue-winged Teal, Gadwall and American Wigeon. Overhead will be ridiculous amounts of Tree Swallows swirling around, and we will spend some time on the deck watching migrating Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, Ospreys and various species of falcons like American Kestrels, Merlins and Peregrine Falcons. As the flight starts to slow down we'll leave the State Park and have an afternoon check-in to hotel. After check-in and a short respite, we will head back to the beach to look at the evening gull/tern roosts. Hordes of Laughing Gulls collect on the beach and with them are often flocks of Forster's, Common and Royal Terns as well as Black Skimmers and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Offshore, Parasitic Jaegers are streaking through the foraging flocks looking for an easy meal to snatch from a gull. Night in Cape May.

Day 3: Higbee Dike and Beach



We will start out with an early departure to legendary Higbee Dike and Beach. This is songbird migration ground zero! The majority of songbirds migrate at night and as dawn arrives, hundreds to thousands of birds start pouring off the ocean and moving up the coastlines to find a suitable stopover site to refuel and rest. At Higbee Dike one can witness this morning flight of birds headed northward as a river of warblers, vireos, woodpeckers, sparrows and other species shoot past the dike. We will hopefully witness a big flight where we will not only be amazed by the sheer number of birds passing by, but also by the sharp-eyed CMBO counters documenting this spectacle of migration! As the flight slows down, we will then spend the rest of morning wandering the brushy fields and woodlot migrant traps as the birds settle down and start to feed. We will explore a few of the local patches including the Rea Farm. This site often produces several rarities a season- migration surprises like Vermilion Flycatcher, Western Tanager, Henslow's Sparrow and many more have occurred here. For the afternoon we will switch gears and head north to the coastal salt marshes Nummy Island and the Wetlands Institute. In these extensive wetlands, we'll look for secretive marsh birds like Clapper Rail and Nelson's, Saltmarsh and Seaside Sparrows. In addition to these specialists, we will also look for more common waders like Tricolored Herons and Snowy Egrets and shorebirds like Black-bellied Plover, Marbled Godwits, "Western" Willets and Red Knots. Night in Cape May.

Day 4: Lower Cape May and boat tour



We will start out again in lower Cape May, if the winds are favorable for a morning flight of songbirds we'll head to Higbee Dike again, or just hit some of the local migrant patches like the Coral Avenue deck to see what's moving along the coast that morning or have a walk around the CMBO's visitor center on Lake Lily. By mid-morning, we'll head over to the nearby docks to take a tour of the salt marshes aboard the boat, the Osprey. This will be an excellent way to get deep into these delicate coastal marshes that exist behind the barrier islands. We will see flocks of staging waders, terns and shorebirds, and if lucky will observe a few lingering "Eastern" Willets, the local breeding race of Willet and likely its own separate species from the more plentiful Western Willets that winter in New Jersey. After the boat tour, we will head back to the State Park to check out the afternoon hawk flight and see what else has dropped in over the course of the day. Night in Cape May.

Day 5: Avalon Seawatch



This morning we will head north to Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. This expansive refuge is a fantastic spot to see vast numbers of waterfowl like Northern Pintails and American Wigeons. Often there is a couple of Eurasian Wigeons waiting to be plucked out by the careful observer. Also of interest will be the first flocks of Brant that overwinter here. We'll stop back at the Avalon Seawatch to see if there is an evening flight of egrets, terns and jaegers. Later in the afternoon, we will go birding at Avalon Seawatch. This dynamic part of the CMBO count programs keeps an observer stationed here dawn to dusk to record the stupendous number of migrating waterbirds. We are likely to see species like Green-winged Teal, Surf and Black Scoters, and Double-crested and hopefully Great Cormorants, and a few Red-throated Loons and Northern Gannets. We will also be looking shorebirds with Western and Purple Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones all possible targets. Night in Cape May.

Day 6: Cape Henlopen and Bombay Hook NWR



Today we will take the ferry from Cape May to Lewes, Delaware. On the ferry we might have an opportunity to see some jaegers. We will then visit Cape Henlopen State Park and Bombay Hook NWR with the hope of finding a Brown-headed Nuthatch. We will return to Philadelphia for the night.

Day 7: Departure

Our Cape May birding tour concludes today. You can depart anytime today for flights home.

What to Expect

Overview

The Cape May tour is a moderately paced birding tour. We will have mostly early morning departures to observe the dawn movements of birds.

Food

We will have a continental breakfast at the hotel each day. Sometimes we will have optional pre-breakfast walks. We often take a picnic lunch in the field, but will occasionally stop at a restaurant for lunch. Dinner is usually at the hotel or a nearby restaurant. Each evening after dinner we compile the day's checklist, review the day's activities, birds, mammals and other observations, and plan the next day's activities.

Accommodation

We stay in comfortable hotel rooms throughout the tour in central locations, close to where we want to go birding each day.

Walking

Most walking will be easy on this tour. There is the possibility of one walk that could be a couple km (up to 1 mile) on sand. Our attempt for marsh birds will involve the guide putting on his rubber boots and walking into water, but participants don't have to do this, though if they want to either have rubber boots or accept getting one's feet wet!

Driving

Most days have a small to moderate amount of driving in a 12-Passenger Van.

Climate

The climate of southern New Jersey is quite pleasant in early October. Daytime highs average around 18°C (65° F), dropping to around 11°C (52° F) at night. However, we will be on the coast a lot and it can be both windy and with a damp chill at times. Rain is certainly possible and raingear with a set of warm clothes, gloves and jackets are recommended.

Boat Trips

We take one 2.5 hour boat trip. The large pontoon boat has an open and enclosed viewing deck with sliding glass panoramic windows, and cushioned seats. There is a bathroom on board. Water conditions will be calm as we tour inland marshes and creeks. There will be extra binoculars including ZEISS demo optics to try out.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- Good quality accommodation
- All meals & soft drinks
- 4 - 8 Participants will be guided by one guide. 9 - 12 participants will be guided by two guides in two vehicles
- All park, conservation and entrance fees
- Boat tour

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Flights to and from start of tour
 - Travel Insurance
 - Items of a personal nature
 - Alcoholic beverages
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