

**CAPE MAY
AND
HAWK MOUNTAIN**

**SEPTEMBER 27 –
OCTOBER 4, 2009**

LEADER: LOUISE ZEMAITIS

COMPILED BY: LOUISE ZEMAITIS

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

CAPE MAY AND HAWK MOUNTAIN

September 27 – October 4, 2009

Leader: Louise Zemaitis

Our tour began on a sunny morning near Atlantic City at the huge impoundments of Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. Upon our arrival, we were greeted by stunning views of Gray Catbirds feeding amongst the fall foliage. Around the wildlife drive, hundreds of Double-crested Cormorants and Forster's Terns hunted for fish as we studied the flocks of ducks, herons, and shorebirds. A group favorite was a Clapper Rail who landed in full view and proceeded to walk along the muddy edge of the marsh not far from where we spotted two American Avocets.

Continuing down the coast, a visit to the Avalon Seawatch and Townsend's Inlet gave us our first look at the Atlantic Ocean. Here we enjoyed nice views of terns feeding in the surf and a large flock of roosting shorebirds and terns. This diverse group included many Black-bellied Plovers and Black Skimmers, at least 100 American Oystercatchers, and two Marbled Godwits. Our closest bird of the day was a beautiful Ruddy Turnstone who stood on the seawall, just a few feet away from our van. Our arrival in Cape May coincided with a cold front, creating ideal birding conditions for the days to come.

We began each day in Cape May with an early breakfast at my house. The consistency of westerly winds dictated morning outings at Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area. On our first morning we found a nice feeding flock of Baltimore Orioles, vireos, and warblers including a beautiful Bay-breasted Warbler. Other highlights included a glimpse of a Red-headed Woodpecker flying by, a Merlin chasing American Crows (they just can't help themselves!), and an Eastern Towhee in the woods. The remainder of the day was spent enjoying the Cape May Point area. We tagged monarch butterflies at Bill and Edie Schuhl's garden, studied gulls on the beach at the end of Coral Avenue, visited Cape May Bird Observatory's Northwood Center, watched hawks at Lily Lake, and spent some time at the Hawkwatch with Pete Dunne (Cape May's celebrity hawk counter).

Our second morning at Higbee began with a rainbow over the "Morning Flight" platform. Northern Flickers flew overhead as we searched for passerines along the field edges. We enjoyed excellent hawkwatching throughout the day in Cape May Point. Other highlights included an indecisive migrant Ruby-throated Hummingbird that we watched turn back from its southbound journey over Delaware Bay, two Cape May Warblers at Cape May Point State Park, two Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers at the Schuhl's garden, and over 500 Black Skimmers on the beach in Cape May City.

We began our last morning in Cape May before breakfast listening to the pre-dawn booming of Great Horned Owls as migrant thrushes called overhead. A fine morning of birding at Higbee includes many birds in the air as well as on the ground. We saw many Northern Flickers, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cedar Waxwings, and a few Bobolinks in flight, while sunny edges produced quite a few songbirds including Tennessee, Black-and-white, Black-throated Blue, and Black-throated Green warblers. Stops were made at the Rea Farm where we enjoyed good views of a Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Cape May Point State Park where we had lunch with a Prairie Warbler, and Pavilion Circle for more hawkwatching before departing for Pennsylvania.

The time spent in the van over the next two days was quite enjoyable. We viewed the autumn foliage and scenery while playing games along the way.

On Friday, after a hearty breakfast at the Nottingham Inn, we went to the nearby Wawa to make our lunch selections and drove north to the Kittatinny Ridge (with a quick field trip to Cabela's en route) to visit the celebrated Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. It was heartening to visit this wonderful sanctuary on the year of its 75th anniversary. We began at the visitor's center before making the one-mile hike to the North Lookout. Winds were not ideal for hawkwatching, but there was a refreshing chill in the air and the threat of rain did not materialize. A lone Merlin who took two passes at an owl decoy over our heads was the highlight of our hawkwatching day. We did, however, enjoy some lovely scenery along with lengthy views of two fine Black-throated Blue Warblers and some human entertainment on the North Lookout. Birds of note around the visitor's center included Magnolia Warbler, White-breasted Nuthatch, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and hybrid Black-capped x Carolina Chickadees. One of the best sightings of the day occurred upon our return to the hotel where five Eastern Bluebirds were spotted in the back yard.

On our last day in the field we drove south to visit Delaware's bayshore. The wildlife drive at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge was full of ducks, geese, egrets, and a few shorebirds. Most memorable was an incoming flock of Snow Geese, apparently making their first arrival from their tundra nesting grounds. We marveled as they made a couple of tentative passes before finally coming to rest. After a delicious crab lunch at Sambo's Tavern (a "must" after a morning at Bombay Hook!), we went to Port Mahon. Here we found flocks of terns and shorebirds along the bayshore, including many Dunlin and Western Sandpipers, a couple of Black-bellied Plovers, and the real prize, three American Golden-Plovers. It was quite puzzling to see a young Peregrine Falcon sitting on the beach in close proximity to the flock. Kim made the best find of the day when she discovered an immature Yellow-crowned Night-Heron amongst the marsh grasses. At the end of the birding day we made our way back to Philadelphia where Michael, our honorary second leader, joined us for our farewell dinner.

ITINERARY

Day 1, September 27: Arrival in Philadelphia; group met at 6:30 pm for a short introductory meeting, then dinner at Lehman's Tavern.

Day 2, September 28: Drove to Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, Brigantine Unit. Stopped at the Seawatch in Avalon and Townsend's Inlet on the way to Cape May. Dinner at Freda's Cafe in Cape May.

Day 3, September 29: Higbee Beach WMA; Cape May Point: Bill and Edie Schuhl's garden for Monarch tagging demo, Coral Avenue dune crossing, Cape May Bird Observatory's Northwood Center, Lily Lake, and the Hawkwatch at Cape May Point State Park. Dinner at Lucky Bones in Cape May.

Day 4, September 30: Higbee Beach WMA; Hawkwatch for Cape May Warblers; Schuhl's garden; Red Trail at Cape May Point State Park; Cape May beach front for Black Skimmers. Dinner at Panico's in West Cape May.

Day 5, October 1: Stevens Street listening to Great Horned Owls; Higbee Beach WMA morning flight and fields; Rea Farm; Cape May Point State Park; Cape May Point: Pavilion Circle and the beach at the end of Alexander Avenue. Drive to Nottingham, Pennsylvania. Dinner at Bucks Restaurant in Rising Sun, MD.

Day 6, October 2: Drive to Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, PA with a stop at Cabela's; picnic lunch at the North Lookout. Dinner at Peppercorns in Oxford, PA.

Day 7, October 3: Bombay Hook NWR, DE; lunch at Sambo's Tavern; marsh and beach along the Delaware Bay, Port Mahon Road. Dinner at Gaberiall's & Fliers.

Day 8, October 4: Departures from Philadelphia.

BIRD LIST (146 species)

(h) = heard only

N=New Jersey (Cape May and Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, Brigantine Unit)

P=Pennsylvania (Hawk Mountain Sanctuary)

D=Delaware (Bombay Hook NWR and Port Mahon)

Snow Goose - D

Canada Goose - N, P, D

Mute Swan - N

American Wigeon - N, D

American Black Duck - N, D

Mallard - N, D

Blue-winged Teal - D

Northern Shoveler - N

Northern Pintail - N, D

Green-winged Teal - N

Ring-necked Duck - N

Black Scoter - N

Wild Turkey - N – one at the Wawa in Vineland

Pied-billed Grebe - N, D

Double-crested Cormorant - N, D

Great Blue Heron - N, D

Great Egret - N, D

Snowy Egret - N, D

Cattle Egret - D – one at Bombay Hook

Green Heron - N

Black-crowned Night-Heron - N – 2 at Forsythe and 11 in flight at Higbee

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron - D – one in the marsh at the end of Port Mahon Road

Black Vulture - N, P

Turkey Vulture - N, P, D

Osprey - N

Bald Eagle - N, D

Northern Harrier - N, D

Sharp-shinned Hawk - N – large flight in Cape May

Cooper's Hawk - N, D – large flight in Cape May

Broad-winged Hawk - N

Red-tailed Hawk - N, P

American Kestrel - N

Merlin - N, P – our favorite raptor at Hawk Mountain

Peregrine Falcon - N, D

Clapper Rail - N – nice view at Forsythe NWR

Common Moorhen - N – one at Cape May Point State Park

American Coot - N

Black-bellied Plover - N

American Golden Plover - D – 3 on the beach at Port Mahon

Semipalmated Plover - N, D

(h)Killdeer - D

American Oystercatcher – N – 100 at Townsend’s Inlet
American Avocet - N, D – Forsythe (2) and Bombay Hook (5)
Solitary Sandpiper – N – 2 at Willow Creek Farm in West Cape May
Greater Yellowlegs - N, D
Lesser Yellowlegs - N, D
Marbled Godwit – D – 2 at Townsend’s Inlet
Ruddy Turnstone - N, D
Sanderling - N
Semipalmated Sandpiper - N
Western Sandpiper - D – 60 at Port Mahon
Least Sandpiper - N
Pectoral Sandpiper – N, D
Dunlin - N, D
Short-billed Dowitcher - N
Long-billed Dowitcher - N
Laughing Gull - N, D
Ring-billed Gull - N, D
Herring Gull - N, D
Great Black-backed Gull - N, D
Caspian Tern - N
Common Tern – N – one at Townsend’s Inlet
Forster's Tern - N, D
Royal Tern - N, D
Black Skimmer - N - amazing flock of 500+ roosting at the Cape May beachfront
Rock Pigeon - N, P, D
Mourning Dove - N, P, D
Yellow-billed Cuckoo – N – one at the Rea Farm
Great Horned Owl – N – 3 heard from Stevens Street before breakfast
Chimney Swift - N
Ruby-throated Hummingbird - N
Belted Kingfisher - N, D
Red-headed Woodpecker - N – flyover at Higbee
Red-bellied Woodpecker - N, D
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - N
Downy Woodpecker - N, P
(h)Hairy Woodpecker – P
Northern Flicker - N, P, D
Eastern Wood-Pewee - N
Eastern Phoebe - N, P
Blue-headed Vireo - N
Philadelphia Vireo - N
Red-eyed Vireo - N
Blue Jay - N, P, D
American Crow - N, P, D
Fish Crow - N, D
Tree Swallow - N, P, D – 100s in Cape May
Northern Rough-winged Swallow - N
Cliff Swallow - N
Barn Swallow - N
Carolina Chickadee - N
Black-capped x Carolina Chickadee hybrid - P – 2+ at Hawk Mountain
Tufted Titmouse - N, P
White-breasted Nuthatch - P

Carolina Wren - N, D
Golden-crowned Kinglet - N
Ruby-crowned Kinglet - N, P
Eastern Bluebird – P – 5 behind the Nottingham Inn
(h)Gray-cheeked Thrush - N
(h)Swainson’s Thrush - N
American Robin - N, D
Gray Catbird - N, D
Northern Mockingbird - N, D
Brown Thrasher - N
European Starling - N, P, D
Cedar Waxwing - N, P
Tennessee Warbler - N
Northern Parula – N
Magnolia Warbler - N, P
Cape May Warbler – N – two near the Hawkwatch at Cape May Point State Park
Black-throated Blue Warbler - N, P – two beautiful males at Hawk Mountain
Yellow-rumped Warbler – N – Myrtle subspecies
Black-throated Green Warbler - N
Prairie Warbler - N
Palm Warbler - N – both Eastern (*hypochrysea*) and Western (*palmarum*) subspecies
Bay-breasted Warbler – N – we saw this uncommon migrant twice in Cape May
Blackpoll Warbler - N
Black-and-white Warbler - N
American Redstart - N
Northern Waterthrush - N
Common Yellowthroat – N, D
Eastern Towhee - N
Chipping Sparrow - N
Field Sparrow – N – 3 at Higbee
Savannah Sparrow - N, D – 40 at Bombay Hook NWR
Song Sparrow - N, D
Swamp Sparrow - N, D
Northern Cardinal - N, P, D
Rose-breasted Grosbeak - N, P – nice view of a male at the Hawk Mountain bird feeders
Indigo Bunting – N, P
Bobolink – N
Red-winged Blackbird - N, D, P
Common Grackle - N, D
Boat-tailed Grackle - N, D
Brown-headed Cowbird - N
Baltimore Oriole - N
House Finch - N, P, D
American Goldfinch – N, P, D
House Sparrow - N, D, P

MAMMALS

Eastern Cottontail
Eastern Gray Squirrel
Woodchuck
White-tailed Deer

BUTTERFLIES

Black Swallowtail (adult and caterpillars)

Cabbage White

Orange Sulphur

Cloudless Sulphur

Gray Hairstreak

Pearl Crescent

Question Mark

American Lady

Painted Lady

Common Buckeye (adult and caterpillars)

Red-spotted Purple

Viceroy

Monarch – though it was a below average season, there were many around (adult and caterpillars)

Fiery Skipper

Sachem

DRAGONFLIES

Common Green Darner – most common of the migrant dragonflies

Swamp Darner

Eastern Pondhawk

Halloween Pennant

Blue-face Meadowhawk

HERPS

Garter Snake