

# **CAPE MAY**

## **A Relaxed & Easy Tour**

**MAY 16 – 21, 2010**

**LEADERS: LOUISE ZEMAITIS & MICHAEL O'BRIEN**

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**Leaders: Louise Zemaitis & Michael O'Brien**

*Although we usually start this tour with a quick exit from Philadelphia, a little fall of migrants caused us to linger right in front of our hotel long enough to see three beautiful Magnolia Warblers in blue spruces and enjoy scope views of a Willow Flycatcher singing from the overgrown field next door. En route to breakfast, we also had roadside views of two toms displaying to a “rafter” of Wild Turkeys.*

*Our Cape May experience began at Jake's Landing where we did some woodland birding, highlighted by unbelievable scope views of a Yellow-throated Warbler, and marsh birding where a male Marsh Wren stole the show, singing his bubbly song and building two nests simultaneously. A stop at Cook's Beach afforded us our first views of Delaware Bay. As the tide fell, we watched Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings, and Semipalmated Sandpipers fly around and gather to feast on horseshoe crab eggs, and Louise gave a demonstration on the natural history of horseshoe crabs. We spent a delightful afternoon leisurely exploring the back bays and salt marsh by pontoon boat aboard The Osprey. Among the many highlights of the trip were displaying Great and Snowy egrets in a heronry, Yellow-crowned Night-Herons hunting in the marsh, noisy American Oystercatchers flying around the boat, numerous lingering Brant, and hundreds of nesting gulls and terns.*

*They say, “When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade.” The forecast for rain on the second day of the tour was spot on, but we made the most of it and had a fun day anyway. An advance party went out and tested that water (so to speak) before breakfast, and witnessed an impressive show of swallows and martins feeding over Lily Lake on Cape May Point. After a gourmet breakfast at The Pier House, we ventured out to bird the Atlantic coastal marshes during high tide. There were more than 100 Whimbrels and a showy Clapper Rail at Shellbay Landing. Little did we know that the rail was the first of many. As we drove along Stone Harbor Boulevard to Nummy Island, we saw numerous Clapper Rails and shorebirds, particularly Short-billed Dowitchers, Black-bellied Plovers, and Dunlin, that had been forced up to the marsh's edge by the unusually high tide. We felt the full drama of the storm when we parked at Townsend's Inlet. Periodic waves crashed over the seawall and sprayed our vans. The nearby ball field in Avalon held another nice surprise. It was full of Semipalmated Plovers and two Lesser Black-backed Gulls!*

*After lunch we cut across the peninsula and made a visit to Cape May Bird Observatory Center for Research and Education where Pete Dunne, its director (and VENT leader), welcomed us. Working our way back south, we stopped at the famous Reed's Beach, one of the primary locations where the horseshoe crab and shorebird phenomenon was first discovered. There were quite a few Red Knots in Bidwell's Creek and we found another Lesser Black-backed Gull on the jetty. Later, on our way to dinner at Freda's Café, we discovered that the easterly winds had brought us one last bonus of the day: a large flock of Northern Gannets plunge-diving in the surf, and dolphins frolicking nearby. What an incredible day!*

*Early morning is the best time to visit the marsh when searching for sparrows. A pre-breakfast stop on Ocean Drive successfully produced several Seaside Sparrows and a particularly handsome Saltmarsh Sparrow. After breakfast, we spent the remainder of the morning woodland birding in Belleplain State Forest. Here we visited one of our favorite Atlantic white cedar groves where we watched a variety of birds including Carolina Chickadee, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Chipping Sparrow, and Eastern Towhee. There were many warblers around us. Hooded made a brief appearance, and Kentucky got pretty close, but was unwilling to show itself. The Louisiana Waterthrushes, however, were quite obliging. A scope-filling Blue-gray Gnatcatcher nest and an elusive Wood Thrush were other favorites of the morning.*

*No trip to Cape May is complete without a visit to the Nature Conservancy's South Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge. During our afternoon walk here we studied Common, Forster's, and Least terns; Greater and Lesser yellowlegs; and Least and Semipalmated sandpipers. We also talked about endangered beach-nesting birds, particularly the Piping Plover that sat quietly on its nest inside a predator enclosure nearby. Upon our return to La Mer, a cooperative male Common Yellowthroat greeted us. For dinner, we went to The Lobster House at the docks in Cape May.*

*Our final morning began with an optional outing to Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area. The previous evening's winds had brought in an excellent push of migrants including Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet and Summer tanagers, and Red-eyed Vireos. Warbler-wise we had wonderful views of Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided, Yellow, Prairie, and three male Blackburnians! The biggest surprise of the morning, however, was a Black Tern that flew overhead as we were birding in the field. A scope-filling Yellow-billed Cuckoo won the prize for the most obliging bird of the day.*

*We spent the remainder of the morning visiting various Cape May Point hotspots. At Cape May Bird Observatory Northwood we enjoyed many fine views of warblers including American Redstart, another male Blackburnian, and a female Black-throated Blue. A couple of Broad-winged Hawks were spotted overhead, Least Terns fished in Lily Lake, and a Carolina Wren sang in uncharacteristically full view. Cape May Point State Park, with its lighthouse, hawkwatch, and nature trails, can be a bird watcher's heaven. During our picnic lunch here, a swan with cygnets was discovered on a nearby pond, while terns and swallows came in to enjoy the fresh water. We took a delightful afternoon walk, seeing more warblers including two Black-throated Greens and the always extraordinary singing Yellow-breasted Chat. We also had fun watching a Tree Swallow and a House Wren singing at their respective boxes.*

*The exceptional weather and birding made it difficult to leave Cape May. We were lucky to have experienced one of the finest days of the spring. We made our last birding stop of the trip where we began, on Delaware Bay. A few hundred shorebirds and a group photo later, we departed for dinner with our favorite waiter, Florian, at Tuscanos, and our hotel in Philadelphia.*

## **ITINERARY**

**May 16:** Arrival in Philadelphia; group met at 6:30 pm for a short introductory meeting, then dinner near the hotel.

**May 17:** Drove to Cape May after breakfast at the Harrison House Diner. Made birding stops at Jake's Landing and Cook's Beach on the Delaware Bayshore; lunch at Lucky Bones, Cape May; afternoon back bay boat cruise aboard the Osprey; dinner at Panico's, West Cape May.

- May 18:** Optional early outing to Cape May Point. Breakfast at Pier House, Cape May; Atlantic Coast marsh birding at Shellbay Landing, Nummy Island, Townsend's Inlet, and Avalon; lunch at Maggie's, Avalon; back to the bayside where we visited Cape May Bird Observatory Center for Research and Education (and Pete Dunne) and Reed's Beach; dinner at Freda's Café, Cape May.
- May 19:** The marsh on Ocean Drive for sparrows; breakfast at Avalon Beans and Bagels, Rio Grande; land birding in Belleplain State Forest; lunch at Southville Corner Diner; afternoon walk at the Nature Conservancy's South Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge; dinner at The Lobster House, Cape May.
- May 20:** Optional early outing for migrant songbirds at Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area; breakfast at Pier House, Cape May; Lily Lake and Cape May Bird Observatory Northwood Center; Sunset Beach; picnic lunch from WaWa and walk at Cape May Point State Park; Louise and Michael's house on Steven's Street, West Cape May; Cook's Beach for last look at shorebirds and Horseshoe Crabs; dinner at Tuscano's, Mullica Hill; drive to Philadelphia.
- May 21:** Departures for home.

### **BIRD LIST (141 species)**

ALL CAPS = tour highlights

(h) = heard only

**Brant** – 20 in Jarvis Sound during back bay cruise

**Canada Goose**

**Mute Swan** – cygnets with adults at Cape May Point State Park

**Gadwall**

**American Black Duck** – several seen in the salt marshes

**Mallard**

**Black Scoter** – 1 seen during back-bay cruise

**Bufflehead** – a lone female in Cape May Harbor

**Ruddy Duck** – another lone female in Bunker Pond at Cape May Point State Park

**Wild Turkey** – a large group with 2 displaying toms seen while en route from Philadelphia

**Northern Gannet** – amazing show seen from Cape May beachfront on Tuesday evening before dinner

**Double-crested Cormorant**

**Great Blue Heron**

**Great Egret** – several displaying at heronry during back-bay cruise

**Snowy Egret** – also at heronry

**Little Blue Heron** – uncommon breeder; 3 seen in Atlantic Coast marshes

**Tricolored Heron** – uncommon breeder; 1 seen

**Green Heron**

**Black-crowned Night-Heron** – 3 at rookery during back-bay cruise

**Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** – 15 seen during back-bay cruise and 1 in Avalon dunes

**Glossy Ibis**

**Black Vulture**

**Turkey Vulture**

**Osprey** – common breeder after near extirpation; many nests seen from “The Osprey”

**Bald Eagle** – another success story; 6 seen

**Northern Harrier** – Jake's Landing

**Cooper's Hawk**

**Broad-winged Hawk** – 2 migrants seen from CMBO Northwood

**Red-tailed Hawk**

**Clapper Rail** – amazing views (at least 20) seen during high tide drive along the Atlantic Coast marshes

**Black-bellied Plover** – many seen during back-bay cruise and high tide drive  
**Semipalmated Plover** – common migrant; 50 seen on Avalon ball field during storm  
**Piping Plover** – endangered species; 2 at South Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge  
**Killdeer**  
**American Oystercatcher** – seen several times, including 18 during back-bay cruise  
**Spotted Sandpiper**  
**Greater Yellowlegs** – 2 at South Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge  
**Willet** – Eastern subspecies that breeds in the coastal marshes  
**Lesser Yellowlegs** – here and there  
**Whimbrel** – back-bay cruise and at least 100 at Shellbay Landing  
**Ruddy Turnstone** – common migrant on the bayshore  
**Red Knot** – many seen during our visits to Cook’s and Reed’s Beaches  
**Sanderling**  
**Semipalmated Sandpiper** – common migrant on the bayshore (though the population is in decline)  
**Least Sandpiper** – many seen on both the bayshore and oceanside  
**Dunlin** – common migrant on the bayshore  
**Short-billed Dowitcher** – common migrant; large numbers seen in Atlantic coast marshes  
**Laughing Gull** – Cape May contains the largest colony in the world  
**Ring-billed Gull**  
**Herring Gull**  
**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** – 4 seen; 1 at Sunset Beach, 1 at Reed’s Beach, and 2 in Avalon  
**Great Black-backed Gull**  
**Least Tern** – threatened in NJ; nests in Cape May County  
**BLACK TERN** – a lone bird seen flying over Higbee Beach WMA; an odd location for a marsh tern  
**Common Tern**  
**Forster's Tern**  
**Black Skimmer** – 2 seen during back-bay cruise  
**Rock Pigeon**  
**Mourning Dove**  
**Yellow-billed Cuckoo** – fabulous views at Higbee Beach WMA  
**Chimney Swift**  
**Ruby-throated Hummingbird**  
**Belted Kingfisher**  
**Red-bellied Woodpecker**  
**Downy Woodpecker**  
**(h) Northern Flicker**  
**Eastern Wood-Pewee**  
**(h) Acadian Flycatcher** – Belleplain State Forest  
**Willow Flycatcher** – right next to our hotel in Philadelphia!  
**Great-crested Flycatcher**  
**Eastern Kingbird** – seen at Jake’s Landing and Higbee Beach WMA  
**White-eyed Vireo**  
**Red-eyed Vireo**  
**Blue Jay**  
**American Crow**  
**Fish Crow**  
**Purple Martin** – large colony at Cape May Point State Park

**Tree Swallow** – many about including one in a nest box at Cape May Point State Park  
**Northern Rough-winged Swallow** – seen very well at Cape May Point State Park  
**Bank Swallow**  
**Cliff Swallow**  
**Barn Swallow** – many about including a pair nesting at Cape May Bird Observatory in Goshen  
**Carolina Chickadee**  
**Tufted Titmouse**  
**Carolina Wren**  
**House Wren** – male singing near nest box at Cape May Point State Park  
**Marsh Wren** – wonderful views of a male singing, displaying, and nest building at Jake’s Landing  
**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** – nest in Belleplaine State Forest  
**Eastern Bluebird** – 1 near nest box at the Mosquito Commission  
(h) **Wood Thrush** – So close!  
**American Robin**  
**Gray Catbird**  
**Northern Mockingbird**  
**Brown Thrasher** – 2 along Jake’s Landing Road  
**European Starling**  
**Cedar Waxwing** – greeted us during our introductory meeting in Philadelphia  
(h) **Blue-winged Warbler** – Belleplaine State Forest  
**Northern Parula** – Higbee Beach WMA and CMBO Northwood Center  
**Yellow Warbler**  
**Chestnut-sided Warbler** – Higbee Beach WMA  
**Magnolia Warbler** – seen best on 1<sup>st</sup> morning at hotel in Philadelphia  
**Black-throated Blue Warbler** – female at CMBO Northwood  
**Yellow-rumped Warbler** – 1 at Cape May Point State Park  
**Black-throated Green Warbler** – 2 at Cape May Point State Park  
**Blackburnian Warbler** – great views of 3 at Higbee Beach WMA and 1 near CMBO Northwood  
**Yellow-throated Warbler** – Jake’s Landing and Belleplaine State Forest  
**Pine Warbler** – Belleplaine State Forest  
**Prairie Warbler** – beautiful views of a singing male at Higbee Beach WMA  
**Blackpoll Warbler** – many seen; particularly nice looks at CMBO Northwood  
(h) **Black-and-white Warbler**  
**American Redstart**  
(h) **Worm-eating Warbler**  
(h) **Ovenbird**  
**Louisiana Waterthrush** – 2 at Belleplaine State Forest!  
(h) **Kentucky Warbler**  
**Common Yellowthroat**  
**Hooded Warbler** – Belleplaine State Forest  
**Wilson’s Warbler** – 1 at CMBO Northwood  
(h) **Canada Warbler**  
**Yellow-breasted Chat** – always a showstopper; singing male at Cape May Point State Park  
**Eastern Towhee** – several seen at Belleplaine State Forest  
**Chipping Sparrow**  
**Field Sparrow** – Higbee Beach WMA  
**SALTMARSH SPARROW** – nice views on Ocean Drive near Cape May  
**Seaside Sparrow**  
**Song Sparrow**  
**Scarlet Tanager** – Belleplaine State forest and Higbee Beach WMA  
**Summer Tanager** – young male at Higbee Beach WMA  
**Northern Cardinal**

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak** – 1 female at Higbee Beach WMA  
**Blue Grosbeak**  
**Indigo Bunting**  
**Red-winged Blackbird**  
**Common Grackle**  
**Boat-tailed Grackle**  
**Brown-headed Cowbird**  
**Orchard Oriole** – Higbee Beach WMA  
**Baltimore Oriole** – 1 at the hotel in Philadelphia on the 1<sup>st</sup> evening  
**House Finch**  
**American Goldfinch**  
**House Sparrow**

### **MAMMALS**

**Eastern Cottontail** – numerous on Cape Island  
**Eastern Gray Squirrel**  
**Woodchuck**  
**Northern Raccoon**  
**Common Muskrat**  
**White-tailed Deer**  
**Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin**

### **HERPS**

**Northern Diamondback Terrapin**  
**Red-eared Slider**  
**Black Rat Snake**  
(h) **Fowler's Toad**  
(h) **Spring Peeper**  
(h) **Northern Gray Treefrog**  
(h) **Southern Gray Treefrog**  
**Green Frog**

### **BUTTERFLIES**

**Eastern Tiger Swallowtail**  
**Black Swallowtail**  
**Cabbage White**  
**Red Admiral**  
**Least Skipper**