

CAPE MAY & HAWK MOUNTAIN

OCTOBER 12-19, 2006

LEADER: MARSHALL ILIFF

**LIST COMPILED BY:
MARSHALL ILIFF**

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM
*Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.***

CAPE MAY & HAWK MOUNTAIN

OCTOBER 12 – 19, 2006

Leader: Marshall Iliff

We timed this year's trip well. On the night we arrived in Philadelphia, a weak cold front pushed through. The next morning was slightly chilly with a light westerly wind as we headed south towards Cape May. Our first birding stop was to check out a roadside Canada Goose flock near a New Jersey State Prison off Route 47. An odd goose was apparent at the front of the flock—a Greater White-fronted Goose. It was an adult bird with a bright orange bill (and thus a Greenland-breeding *flavirostris*). It turned out to be the rarest bird of the tour.

A rarer bird had been seen that morning at Cape May—a Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher—but it flew off to the north and was never seen again. The morning's flight had been a good one with some 20,000 birds (mostly Yellow-rumped Warblers) leaving Cape May. At the lighthouse we found a corner that was literally hopping with birds and we stayed there until lunch; Blackpoll Warblers, Black-throated Blue Warblers, Brown Creepers, both kinglets, Hermit Thrushes, sparrows, and several other species all vied for our attention.

After lunch we enjoyed a sunny walk at the Villas Wildlife Management Area where a flock of 200 Palm Warblers held several other species of warblers, and some nice butterflies as well. Cape May is full of such surprises brought on the magic of the migration. One morning it was the Black-throated Blue Warbler pair feeding on porcelain berries at eye level; another morning it was watching the overhead migration of flickers and other birds crossing the Cape May canal from the Morning Flight Platform; another day it was trying to pick up the hawk stream high overhead; one evening it was a parade of Merlins streaking past; and another morning it was encountering a late Mourning Warbler in the field edges of The Beanery.

One afternoon we visited Brigantine, which became one of our highlights. Ducks were in abundance, as were herons, shorebirds, and terns. A cooperative juvenile Peregrine Falcon posed for scope views and then set off to terrorize the other birds. A nearby mixed flock of shorebirds held several White-rumped Sandpipers among Semipalmateds and Dunlin. Matt's sharp eyes in the back of the van picked out a cryptic immature Black-crowned Night-Heron. On the Brigantine wildlife loop, there is always something special.

Our time at Cape May wrapped up with a tight cluster of Black Skimmers resting on the beach before we boarded the Cape May-Lewes Ferry. After a pizza lunch we squeezed in a little more birding. Brown-headed Nuthatches at Cape Henlopen were the target, and were so responsive that one actually pecked at my iPod speaker. We couldn't ask for better looks at them, or at brilliant male Pine Warblers in the same area.

Our Bombay Hook day was certainly the most challenging. Intermittent rain plagued us all day and ranged from a light drizzle to a downpour. Despite the weather we managed to find some good birds and see some great sights. Avocet, Hudsonian Godwit, Stilt Sandpiper, and Short-billed Dowitcher were all new shorebirds for us on this day. The duck and goose numbers at Bombay Hook were staggering and the golden vista of the saltmarsh grasses added a scenic element to the day. Most

memorable were fields blanketed by thousands of Snow Geese that rose up in a blizzard of white and a chorus of sound. In one such field one of the closer birds turned out to be a small Ross's Goose that, despite the wind and rain, was actually quite easy to pick out in binoculars.

After a delicious crab lunch we made a stab at sharp-tailed sparrows, but the rain worsened and we went to plan B. A reported Barnacle Goose in Maryland tempted us to detour west, but luck was not on our side. Although we found many geese at Great Oak Pond, the Barnacle was not among them. Our day concluded with our grand finale dinner—one day early so that Libby could join—at the extravagant Fair Hill Inn. What a night!

Our final day at Hawk Mountain was a fitting grand finale. Atop the North Lookout we were treated to magnificent views of the fall palette of colors. Hawks were streaming by during our entire time up there. Most were Sharp-shinned Hawks, including many adults. Highlights were a Merlin, a couple of Peregrines, and our first ravens, along with a Bald Eagle and some great looks at harriers. The hike down was serene and wonderful in the October woods.

This was possibly the most good-natured group I've ever been with. By the end of the week together it felt like we were family. I hope to see some of you again soon!

ITINERARY

Day 1, October 12: arrival in Philadelphia; dinner at The Tavern at Burk's Bend

Day 2, October 13: Drove directly to Cape May, stopping at the prison off Rte. 47 where we found a Greater White-fronted Goose (!). Cape May: Higbees Beach, Cape May Point for warblers in cedars; lunch at The Depot; Villas WMA on bayshore; South Cape May Meadows. Dinner at Godmother's; Weak cold front passed overnight. Cool in morning becoming warm, clear, light westerlies.

Day 3, October 14: Cape May: Higbee's Beach, hawkwatch; lunch at The Depot; afternoon break followed by a visit to 400 Coral Ave. for Monarch tagging demo; short seawatch from St. Mary's; South Cape May Meadows; dinner at Cape Orient. Cool in morning becoming warm, clear, light westerlies.

Day 4, October 15: Cape May: Higbees Beach in the morning; short walk at The Beanery; stop at Goshen CMBO center; lunch at Shea's Café near Brig; Brigantine N.W.R. (actually Edwin B. Forsythe N.W.R., Brigantine Unit); afternoon stop at Nummy's Island. Dinner at Godmother's. Warm, clear, with light west winds.

Day 5, October 16: Cape May: Higbee's Beach (good flight) and misc. Cape May Pt. spots (concrete ship, traffic circle, beachfront for skimmers); crossed Delaware Bay on the 11:00 Cape May-Lewes Ferry; lunch at Grotto Pizza, Rehobeth Beach; Cape Henlopen Pt. SP; dinner at The Post House. Warm, clear, with light W winds.

Day 6, October 17: Bombay Hook NWR, DE; lunch at Sambo's; brief visit to Little Creek and Port Mahon; "wild goose chase" for Barnacle Goose at Great Oak Pond, Kent County, MD; dinner at

The Fair Hill Inn. Cool, with light to intermittent heavy rain all day long.

Day 7, October 18: Hawk Mountain, PA; picnic lunch, dinner at The Post House. Beautiful clear crisp fall day with temps rising to mid-70s and light W winds making for a great day of hawkwatching, with about 260 hawks seen for the day (mostly Sharpies). Dinner at The Post House.

Day 8, October 19: early morning birding at Cherry Hill Landfill; departure for home.

BIRD LIST (146 species)

ALL CAPS = tour highlights in

(h) = heard only

N=New Jersey

D=Delaware

P=Pennsylvania

M=Maryland

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE - N - The rarity of the trip for us was the adult of the Greenland subspecies (*flavirostris*) that we found at the Rte. 47 prison!

Snow Goose - N, D, M - impressive blizzards at Bombay Hook NWR

ROSS'S GOOSE - D - nice white adult near Leipsic, DE

Brant - N

Canada Goose - N, D, P, M

TUNDRA SWAN - M - one adult in Kent County, MD; apparently this bird summered locally.

Mute Swan - N

Wood Duck - N

Gadwall - N, D

American Wigeon - N

American Black Duck - N, D

Mallard - N, D, M

Blue-winged Teal - N, D - several at Cape May

Northern Shoveler - N, D

Northern Pintail - N, D

Green-winged Teal - N, D, M

Ring-necked Duck - N - one early one on Lily Lake

Lesser Scaup - M - one early one at Great Oak Pond

Canvasback - M - one very early male at Great Oak Pond

Surf Scoter - N

Ruddy Duck - N, M

Common Loon - N, P - 2 flyovers at Higbees, 2 flew past Hawk Mt.

Pied-billed Grebe - N

Double-crested Cormorant - N, D

GREAT CORMORANT - N, D - juvenile at Concrete Ship; 5 in Lewes, DE

AMERICAN BITTERN - D - one flushed in the 11th hour at Port Mahon

Great Blue Heron - N, D

Great Egret - N, D

Snowy Egret - N, D

Little Blue Heron - N

Black-crowned Night-Heron - N

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON - N - at least 5, including 2 adults and three juveniles, at Nummy's Island; late.

Black Vulture - N, P
Turkey Vulture - N, D, M, P
Osprey - N, D, P
Bald Eagle - N, D, P
Northern Harrier - N, D, P
Sharp-shinned Hawk - N, D, P - good flights at Cape May and Hawk Mt. (244)
Cooper's Hawk - N, P
Broad-winged Hawk - N - one at Cape May
Red-tailed Hawk - N, D, P, M
American Kestrel - N, D, P
Merlin - N, P
Peregrine Falcon - N, P - seen well sat Cape May and Hawk Mt.
Common Moorhen - N - one on Bunker Pond by Cape May hawkwatch platform
American Coot - N, D
Wawa - N, D, P - a tour favorite, both subspecies seen (bathroom and non-bathroom)
Black-bellied Plover - N
Semipalmated Plover - N - Brig
Killdeer - N, D
American Oystercatcher - N
American Avocet - D - Bombay Hook only
Greater Yellowlegs - N, D
Lesser Yellowlegs - D
HUDSONIAN GODWIT - N - one at Bombay Hook was a special treat
Marbled Godwit - N - 10 at Nummy's Island
Red Knot - N
Semipalmated Sandpiper - N - more common than usual, with 15 at Brig
Least Sandpiper - D
White-rumped Sandpiper - N - good looks at several juveniles at Brig
Dunlin - N, D
Stilt Sandpiper - D - one at Bombay Hook
Short-billed Dowitcher - D - one juvenile at Bombay Hook
Long-billed Dowitcher - N, D, M - one near Harmony Corner, MD, was unusual
Wilson's Snipe - N
Laughing Gull - N, D, M
Ring-billed Gull - N, D, M
Herring Gull - N, D
LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL - D - great views of at least 10 at Cherry Island Landfill
Great Black-backed Gull - N, D
Royal Tern - N
Forster's Tern - N, D
Black Skimmer - N - amazing flock of 300+ along Cape May beachfront
Rock Pigeon - N, D, P, M
Mourning Dove - N, D, P, M
Belted Kingfisher - N, D
Red-bellied Woodpecker - N, D
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - N - nice look on our final morning
Downy Woodpecker - N, D, P
Hairy Woodpecker - N, P - heard-only at Hawk Mt.
Northern Flicker - N, D, P
Eastern Phoebe - N, D
White-eyed Vireo - D - one at Cape Henlopen
Blue-headed Vireo - D, P

Red-eyed Vireo - N
Blue Jay - N, D, P
American Crow - N, D, P, M
Fish Crow - N
Common Raven - P - two at Hawk Mt.
Horned Lark - D - nice looks near Bombay Hook
Tree Swallow - N, D, P - some incredible swarms
Northern Rough-winged Swallow - N - up to 10 near hawkwatch 14 Oct
Carolina Chickadee - N, D
Black-capped Chickadee - P
Tufted Titmouse - N, D, P
Red-breasted Nuthatch - N - one at Cape May Pt.
 (h) **White-breasted Nuthatch - P**
Brown-headed Nuthatch - D
Brown Creeper - D - great looks at Cape May Pt. 13 Oct
Carolina Wren - N, D, P
 (h) **House Wren - N** - heard only at Higbees
Winter Wren - N - good looks near hawkwatch
Marsh Wren - N - one out of habitat at the Beanery and one at Brig
Golden-crowned Kinglet - N, D, P
Ruby-crowned Kinglet - N, D, P
Eastern Bluebird - D
Hermit Thrush - N, P
SWAINSON'S THRUSH - N - one late individual at the hawkwatch platform
American Robin - N, D, P
Gray Catbird - N, D, P
Northern Mockingbird - N, D
Brown Thrasher - N
European Starling - N, D, M, P
Cedar Waxwing - N
Northern Parula - N - very common this year
Black-throated Blue Warbler - N - amazing point-blank looks on two dates
Yellow-rumped Warbler - N - Myrtle subspecies; seen by the hundreds (on 13 Oct Hogbees counters estimated almost 20,000
Pine Warbler - N, D
Palm Warbler - N - hundreds on 15 Oct. Most were Yellow (*hypochrysea*) subspecies, but we had several "Western Palm Warbler" (subspecies *palmarum*) at Cape May for comparison
Blackpoll Warbler - N
Black-and-white Warbler - N
American Redstart - N
Northern Waterthrush - N - heard only
MOURNING WARBLER - N - one at the Beanery Oct. 15 which was very very late (latest ever for Cape May was Oct. 22)
Common Yellowthroat - N
Scarlet Tanager - N - nice looks at a female at Higbees Beach
Eastern Towhee - N, P
Chipping Sparrow - N, D
Field Sparrow - N
Savannah Sparrow - N, D
SALTMARSH SHARP-TLD. SPARROW - N - we tracked down this mouse-like bird at Brig
Song Sparrow - N, D, P
Swamp Sparrow - N, D

White-throated Sparrow - N, P
White-crowned Sparrow - N, D
Dark-eyed Junco - N
Northern Cardinal - N, D, P
Blue Grosbeak - N - briefly seen at Higbee's
Indigo Bunting - N
Red-winged Blackbird - N, D, P
Eastern Meadowlark - N
Common Grackle - N, D, M, P - large flocks
Boat-tailed Grackle - N
Brown-headed Cowbird - N, D
Baltimore Oriole - N
House Finch - N, D
House Sparrow - N, D, P

Leader only: Golden Eagle (one at Hawk Mt. came by just after the group started downhill!), American Pipit,
Nashville Warbler, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Purple Finch, American Goldfinch

MAMMALS (4 species)

Eastern Gray Squirrel - N, P, D
Eastern Cottontail - N
Eastern Chipmunk - P
White-tailed Deer - D - including a striking white animal at Cape Henlopen

BUTTERFLIES (7 species)

Orange Sulphur - N
Cabbage White - N, D
Variiegated Fritillary - N - one seen nicely at Villas WMA
Common Buckeye - N
American Lady - N - several seen
Red Admiral - N - one seen well at Higbee's
Monarch - N, D, P

DRAGONFLIES (2 species)

Black Saddlebags - N
meadowhawk sp. - P - just 2, leader-only

HERPS (4 species)

Red-spotted Newt - P - ten at Hawk Mt.'s pond
Bullfrog - P - Two at Hawk Mt.'s pond still had tails
Eastern Painted Turtle - P - one at Hawk Mt.'s pond
Eastern Garter Snake - P - one at Hawk Mt.