

**CAPE MAY
AND
HAWK MOUNTAIN**

**SEPTEMBER 28 –
OCTOBER 5, 2008**

LEADERS: LOUISE ZEMAITIS AND MICHAEL O'BRIEN

COMPILED BY: LOUISE ZEMAITIS

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

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Leaders: Louise Zemaitis and Michael O'Brien

Coastal migration is all about the weather. During most of September there had been an unusual amount of easterly winds creating conditions for below average numbers of migrant birds. All we needed was one cold front to shake things up. On our first evening in Philadelphia, the tour began with a rainstorm, the bellwether of the passage of a good cold front. The next morning we got up early and headed straight to Cape May.

Cape May greeted us with all of its splendor. We went to the end of Sunset Boulevard where we could be right in the flight line. Here we witnessed a spectacular flight of Sharp-shinned Hawks and American Kestrels. There were hundreds of shimmering Blue Jays and many golden Northern Flickers, as the morning sun caught their wings. The variety of hawks seen was most impressive, including a Peregrine Falcon that grabbed one of the Blue Jays out of the air and took it to a perch on the nearby water tower. Our day was spent in a number of different locations in order to view migrants from every vantage point, from the morning flight at Sunset Boulevard to sea-watching from the dunes in Cape May Point, to hawk-watching at the Rea Farm in West Cape May and the Hawkwatch platform at Cape May Point State Park. It was at the Rea Farm that we saw one of the rarest birds of the trip, a juvenile Mississippi Kite! During our lunch at Cape May Point State Park, we enjoyed close views of warblers including Magnolia, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped, Prairie, and Palm. On this day, more than any other of our trip, we were able to witness the full spectrum of migration.

We began each day in Cape May with an early breakfast at The Queen Ann (my sister's Victorian house). On our second morning we drove to the famous "Morning Flight" platform at Higbee where birders go to witness visible passerine migration. Here we caught an impressive flight that included Eastern Wood-Pewee, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Baltimore Oriole, and a variety of warblers. The remainder of the day was spent enjoying the Cape May area. During a stop at Bill and Edie Schuhl's garden in Cape May Point, we enjoyed a Monarch tagging demonstration and studied butterflies as hawks and dragonflies buzzed over our heads. It was another big raptor day with highlights including 5 Bald Eagles and at least 50 Peregrine Falcons.

The next day was spent exploring the coastal marshes. An early start at Two Mile Landing produced perfect views of Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed and Seaside sparrows. In Stone Harbor we saw both races of Willet (numerous Westerns and a late Eastern), and at Stone Harbor Point we studied a flock of about 20 Piping Plovers on the beach, along with numerous Western Sandpipers and other shorebirds. Brigantine was absolutely filled with birds. There were hundreds of geese, ducks, shorebirds, and gulls. We made several stops along the wildlife route. It was on one of these stops that we saw a beautiful juvenile Ruff, the bird of the day. It even trumped the 5 American Avocets that were in the same pool! Throughout the day Michael conducted an informal shorebird workshop, and our final tally reached 21 shorebird species.

The northerly winds on our last morning in Cape May dictated another early start at Higbee. Most memorable was a Red-headed Woodpecker that flew over, enabling the Lincoln's Sparrow that we had been zeroing in on to give us the slip. During a stop at the Cape May beachfront we finally decided to count the roosting birds on the beach. It was a spectacular concentration of 800 Royal Terns and 1,000 Black Skimmers! After loading the van, making our last rounds through Cape May Point, and lunch at The Queen Ann, we headed to Pennsylvania for the next stage of our tour.

Friday, with its westerly winds, proved to be the best day to visit Hawk Mountain. 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. We began our visit to Hawk Mountain Sanctuary at the visitor's center before making the one-mile hike to the North Lookout. The morning's chill brought promise of a decent hawk migration, which started out slowly but picked up by midday. It is always a treat to see birds from above, and we had excellent views of a number of hawks including Osprey, Bald Eagle, and Peregrine Falcon. Of particular interest was the fact that we witnessed at least 10 Blackpoll Warblers exhibiting onward migration, a diurnal southbound movement by an otherwise primarily nocturnal migrant. Another subject of keen interest was the presence of hybrid Carolina x Black-capped Chickadees. We were unable to find any pure Black-capped Chickadees, the only species present here a decade ago.

The changing autumn foliage throughout the trip was quite beautiful. On our last full day in the field, we drove south to visit Delaware's bayshore. The wildlife drive at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge was drier than usual, but we still saw a number of waterfowl and shorebirds, particularly when raptors came by to flush them. A non-bird favorite of the morning was a red fox that was seemingly awoken from its morning nap as we passed. After a delicious crab lunch, we went to Port Mahon. Here we found large flocks of terns and shorebirds. From the vans we had close studies of Caspian, Forster's, and Royal terns perched on the pilings, and Semipalmated, Western, and White-rumped sandpipers, and Dunlin on the beach. The lighting was spectacular!

On our final morning, after enjoying a nice variety of songbirds at White Clay Creek, we headed to the airport and bid each other farewell.

ITINERARY

Day 1, September 28: Arrival in Philadelphia; group met at 6:30 pm for a short introductory meeting, then dinner at Ruby Tuesday next to the hotel.

Day 2, September 29: Drove directly to Cape May. Sunset Boulevard in the area of the World War II Fire Control Tower; dune crossing at the end of Coral Avenue, Cape May Point; Rea Farm (Steven's Street, West Cape May); Cape May Point State Park for picnic lunch, Hawkwatch, and a walk on the red trail; returned to Sunset Boulevard for afternoon hawkwatching; beachfront in Cape May to view flock of Black Skimmers; Dinner at Panicos in West Cape May.

Day 3, September 30: Higbee Beach WMA; Cape May Point: Bill and Edie Schuhl's garden at Cape May Point for Monarch tagging demo; short seawatch at the end of Brainard Avenue; Cape May Bird Observatory's Northwood Center; lunch at The Queen Ann; Lily Lake; Cape May Point State Park. Dinner at Freda's Café, Cape May.

Day 4, October 1: Early morning at Two Mile Landing for marsh sparrows; Stone Harbor: Wetlands Institute, Stone Harbor Point, and Nummy's Island; picnic lunch and birding at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, Brigantine Unit. Dinner at The Lobster House, Cape May.

Day 5, October 2: Higbee Beach WMA; Cape May beachfront for terns and skimmers; Hawkwatch at Cape May Point State Park; quick drive around Cape May Point looking at Monarchs; Rea Farm (Stevens Street); lunch at The Queen Ann; drive to Pennsylvania. Dinner at Numzee's in Oxford, PA.

Day 6, October 3: Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, PA; picnic lunch at the North Lookout. Dinner at Bucks Restaurant, Rising Sun, MD.

Day 7, October 4: Bombay Hook NWR, DE; lunch at Sambo's Tavern; Port Mahon Road. Dinner at Peppercorns, Oxford, PA.

Day 8, October 5: Early morning birding at White Clay Creek, DE; departure for home.

BIRD LIST (146 species)

ALL CAPS = tour highlights in

(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, Port Mahon, and White Clay Creek)

Snow Goose - N

Canada Goose - N, P, D

Mute Swan - N

Gadwall - N

American Wigeon - N, D

American Black Duck - N, D

Mallard - N, D

Blue-winged Teal - N - several at Cape May

Northern Shoveler - N, D

Northern Pintail - N, D

Green-winged Teal - N, D

Surf Scoter - N

Ruddy Duck - N

Wild Turkey - N – at least 50 on the first morning on our drive to Cape May

Pied-billed Grebe - N

Northern Gannet - N

Double-crested Cormorant - N, D

Great Blue Heron - N, D

Great Egret - N, D

Snowy Egret - N, D

Little Blue Heron - N

Tricolored Heron - N – 10 at Nummy Island

Cattle Egret - Maryland – en route to airport on last morning

Black-crowned Night-Heron - N – 2 immatures at Brigantine

Glossy Ibis - N

Black Vulture - N, P, D

Turkey Vulture - N, P, D

Osprey - N, P, D

MISSISSIPPI KITE - N – Rare at Cape May in the fall. We watched it hunt at the Rea Farm.

Bald Eagle - N, P, D

Northern Harrier - N, P, D

Sharp-shinned Hawk - N, P, D – incredible flight in Cape May

Cooper's Hawk - N, P, D

Broad-winged Hawk - N
Red-tailed Hawk - N, P, D
American Kestrel - N, P, D – large flight at Cape May
Merlin - N
Peregrine Falcon - N, P, D
Clapper Rail - N – heard in several places and glimpsed at Forsythe
Black-bellied Plover - N
Semipalmated Plover - N, D
Piping Plover – N – 20 on the beach at Stone Harbor Point!
Killdeer - N, D
American Oystercatcher - N
American Avocet - N, D – Forsythe (5) and Bombay Hook (15)
Greater Yellowlegs - N, D – large numbers seen at Forsythe
Willet – N – both Western and Eastern subspecies were seen
Lesser Yellowlegs - N, D
Ruddy Turnstone - N, D
Sanderling - N
Semipalmated Sandpiper - N, D
Western Sandpiper - N, D – 150 at Port Mahon
Least Sandpiper - N
White-rumped Sandpiper - N, D
Pectoral Sandpiper - N
Dunlin - N, D
Stilt Sandpiper - N, D
RUFF - N – spectacular views of a juvenile male at Forsythe
Short-billed Dowitcher - N, D
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, D
Royal Tern - N, D
Common Tern - N
Forster's Tern - N, D
Black Skimmer - N - amazing flock of 1000+ roosting at the Cape May beachfront
Rock Pigeon - N, P, D
Mourning Dove - N, P, D
Common Nighthawk - N
Chimney Swift - N, P, D
Ruby-throated Hummingbird - N
Belted Kingfisher - N, D
RED-HEADED WOODPECKER - N – flyover at Higbee
Red-bellied Woodpecker - N, D
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - N, D
Downy Woodpecker - N, P, D
Hairy Woodpecker – D – White Clay Creek
Northern Flicker - N, P, D
Eastern Wood-Pewee - N
Eastern Phoebe - N, D
White-eyed Vireo - N
Blue-headed Vireo - N
(h) Warbling Vireo - N

Red-eyed Vireo - N
Blue Jay - N, P, D
American Crow - N, P, D
Fish Crow - N, P, D
Common Raven - P – seven at Hawk Mt.
Tree Swallow - N, P, D – 1000s in Cape May
Cliff Swallow - N
Barn Swallow - N
Carolina Chickadee - N, D
Black-capped x Carolina Chickadee hybrid - P – 2+ at Hawk Mountain
Tufted Titmouse - N, P, D
Red-breasted Nuthatch - N
White-breasted Nuthatch - P
Carolina Wren - N, P, D
(h) Golden-crowned Kinglet - N, P
Ruby-crowned Kinglet - N, P
American Robin - N, P, D
Gray Catbird - N, P, D
Northern Mockingbird - N, P, D
Brown Thrasher - N, D
European Starling - N, P, D
Cedar Waxwing - N, P, D
Northern Parula – N
Magnolia Warbler - N, P
Cape May Warbler - N
Black-throated Blue Warbler - N, P
Yellow-rumped Warbler - N, D - Myrtle subspecies
Black-throated Green Warbler - N, D
Prairie Warbler - N
Palm Warbler - N – both Eastern (*hypochrysea*) and Western (*palmarum*) subspecies
Blackpoll Warbler - N, P – 10 seen flying past Hawk Mountain (diurnal onward migration)
Black-and-white Warbler - N
American Redstart - N
Common Yellowthroat - N
Scarlet Tanager - N
(h) Eastern Towhee - N
Savannah Sparrow - N, D
SALTMARSH SHARP-TAILED SPARROW - N – many at 2 Mile Landing on a perfect morning
Seaside Sparrow
Song Sparrow - N, P, D
Lincoln's Sparrow - N – seen a Higbee (until the Red-headed Woodpecker distracted us)
Swamp Sparrow - N, D
(h) White-throated Sparrow - N
Northern Cardinal - N, P, D
Rose-breasted Grosbeak - N, D
Blue Grosbeak - N - briefly seen at Higbee's
Indigo Bunting - N
Bobolink - N
Red-winged Blackbird - N, D, P
Common Grackle - N, D
Boat-tailed Grackle - N, D
Brown-headed Cowbird - N, D
Baltimore Oriole - N – fly by at Higbee's Morning Flight

House Finch - N, D
American Goldfinch – N, P, D
House Sparrow - N, D, P

MAMMALS

Eastern Cottontail
Eastern Gray Squirrel
Eastern Chipmunk
Woodchuck
Red Fox – strolling across a field at Bombay Hook
White-tailed Deer
Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin – large pod off of Cape May Point

BUTTERFLIES

Black Swallowtail
Cabbage White
Orange Sulphur
Cloudless Sulphur
Pearl Crescent
Mourning Cloak
American Lady
Painted Lady
Red Admiral
Common Buckeye
Monarch – though it was a below average season, there were many around
Long-tailed Skipper
Horace’s Duskywing
Fiery Skipper
Sachem

DRAGONFLIES

Common Green Darner – most common of the migrant dragonflies
Swamp Darner
Great Blue Skimmer – a very old one at Cape May Point State Park
Blue Dasher
Black Saddlebags
Carolina Saddlebags
Wandering Glider

Misc. COOL INSECTS

Wheel Bug – female with two males on her back; no comment...
Northern Walking Stick – on the trail to North Lookout at Hawk Mountain
Small Milkweed Bug – on Tropical Milkweed in the Schuhl’s butterfly garden

HERPS

Eastern Mud Turtle
Eastern Painted Turtle
Northern Red-bellied Cooter
Eastern Snapping Turtle
Northern Spring Peeper
Cope’s (Southern) Gray Treefrog