

FIELD REPORT

SPRING IN CAPE MAY

Relaxed & Easy

MAY 8–14, 2022



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron ©Michael O'Brien

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SPRING IN CAPE MAY: RELAXED & EASY MAY 8–14, 2022

By Louise Zemaitis

Our Spring in Cape May tour was as interesting and exciting as ever. But as we have learned many times over, weather plays a key role in birding, particularly on a peninsula like Cape May. This year, an unprecedented 5-day nor'easter resulted in high winds tearing up Atlantic Coast beaches, flooding coastal marshes, and keeping water temperatures much colder than normal. The result was many displaced birds, which, for us, created challenges for finding some species and opportunities for finding others. We improvised to accommodate these unusual conditions and had many amazing sightings over the course of our week at this birding mecca.



American Oystercatchers trying to shelter from the wind ©Michael O'Brien

Because winds were much stronger along the coast than inland, we began our first morning right in Philadelphia at John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge. Always a great place for migrants, Heinz did not disappoint. We were greeted first by a close Solitary Sandpiper in a rain pool, followed by flyover Bald Eagle and Red-shouldered Hawk. Clear skies and chilly temperatures made the sunny edge pop with migrants, including a brilliant Scarlet Tanager, White-crowned and White-throated sparrows, and a good variety of warblers including Black-and-white, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, and Black-throated Blue. Around the marsh trail, we found Marsh Wren, Warbling Vireo, Least Flycatcher, Prairie Warbler, American Redstart, and numerous swallows. After lunch in Cape May, our next stop was at Louise and Michael's yard to view the feeders and look for migrants sheltering from the wind. There we were treated to close views of many colorful birds, including Baltimore and Orchard orioles, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Indigo Bunting.

We began our second day in the breezy Cape May Point dunes, watching for migrants over Delaware Bay. Among various gulls and terns, highlights included Common and Red-throated loons, Northern Gannet, a flyby Merlin, a dozen confiding Purple Sandpipers, and a pair of striking American Oystercatchers. A walk through the woods at nearby Cape May Point State Park produced Great Crested Flycatcher, Blue-headed Vireo, Ovenbird, Worm-eating and Pine warblers, and Northern Parula. Due to chilly temperatures and windy conditions, feeding opportunities for our local Purple Martins were very limited, so we saw them huddling together on the ground, in the sun and out of the wind, in order to conserve energy—a rare sight to see. In the afternoon, we explored coastal marshes at Shellbay and Bennys landings. With high water levels, much of the marsh was flooded, so marsh denizens like Clapper Rail had nowhere to hide. We had excellent views of several of these birds, which can often be very difficult to see. Also present was a flock of 150 Whimbrels, which feed in these marshes for a few weeks on their way north to arctic breeding grounds. Among the Whimbrels were other migrant shorebirds including Semipalmated Plover, Short-billed Dowitcher, and Greater and Lesser yellowlegs (offering excellent comparisons), plus the locally breeding Willet and the very uncommon Gull-billed Tern.



Purple Sandpipers on wave-washed jetty ©Michael O'Brien

Our third day began at Belleplain State Forest, one of our favorite places to visit in spring. Here the forest was filled with birdsong. We tracked down many of these songsters and had particularly nice views of Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-throated and Prothonotary warblers, and a handsome young male Summer Tanager. We were also excited to observe quite a bit of nesting activity: Eastern Phoebe (occupied nest), Carolina Chickadees (excavating a nest hole), Eastern Bluebirds (entering their nest box), and Chipping Sparrows (nest building). The morning was made complete by a dazzling Ruby-throated Hummingbird flashing its brilliant gorget at us at the field office. After picnicking at Nummy

Lake, we worked our way down the Bayshore, stopping first at Cook's Beach where we were welcomed by wonderful views of Seaside Sparrow. One unfortunate result of the nor'easter is that an influx of unusually cold water halted the spawning of Horseshoe Crabs, which would normally be reaching its peak along the Bayshore at this date. As a result, many shorebirds that depend on Horseshoe Crab eggs to fuel their journeys to arctic breeding grounds had to go elsewhere to find food. Among the shorebirds present, we had particularly close views of Sanderlings exhibiting a wide range of plumages (the variety dictated primarily by their molt timing). Our last stop of the day was at a hauntingly beautiful "ghost forest" at Dennis Creek Wildlife Management Area. These stands of dead trees, created by saltwater intrusion, serve as a poignant reminder that sea level rise is real. These dead trees are a boon for a variety of cavity-nesting birds, including Red-headed Woodpecker, which was one of our favorite sightings of the trip.



Summer Tanager ©Michael O'Brien

A visit to Cape May during migration would be incomplete without a trip to Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area. Every day is different where land meets water at the southernmost point in New Jersey. Though the sky was relatively quiet during our morning outing, we did find some beauties in the fields, including eye-popping Indigo Buntings, a field full of Eastern Kingbirds, and a couple of bubbling Bobolinks. Our day's main event was a pontoon boat ride ("Saltmarsh Safari") to Cape May Harbor and Jarvis Sound on the *Osprey* with Captain Bob Lubberman. Bob's skill and expertise enabled us to enjoy a glorious excursion where we had our best views of Common and Forster's terns, Red-throated and Common loons, American Oystercatcher, Black-bellied Plover, Red Knot, Semipalmated Sandpiper, and many more. But our most unusual find, an immature Little Gull, was one for the rare bird alert (causing landbound local birders to search from a nearby bridge). A scarce species anywhere in North America, and primarily pelagic at this season, this bird must've found its

way into Cape May Harbor to shelter from persistent northeast winds. In the afternoon, we visited Lily Lake on Cape May Point, where dozens of swallows and swifts were feeding low over the water—something we often see in dreary conditions when aerial insects are forced to stay low. This provided excellent opportunities for study, and we enjoyed seeing all six of the expected local swallows. We wrapped up the day with a quick visit to Cove Pool, where we saw ten Lesser Black-backed Gulls, a primarily Eurasian species that had been steadily increasing as a non-breeding visitor to the East Coast.



Immature Little Gull, a rare visitor to Cape May ©Michael O'Brien

Saving some of the best for last, we spent our final day visiting a few of the area's most well-known locations. Starting at The Nature Conservancy's South Cape May Meadows, we added several new species to our trip list: Blue-winged Teal, Gadwall, Stilt Sandpiper, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Savannah Sparrow, not to mention fine views of Blue Grosbeak and Field Sparrow. Heading north, we made a stop at Ocean City Welcome Center's fabulous heronry, where activity level was at its peak. Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned night-herons and Great Egrets exhibited their finery at their nests, while Glossy and White ibises (the latter much more numerous than in previous years) jostled for positions. We were excited to also find a single White-faced Ibis, a rare western cousin of Glossy Ibis (it was later observed paired up with a Glossy). A highlight for many of us was the wildlife drive at Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. Here we enjoyed a master class on shorebird ID with Michael and proved that perseverance pays when looking for Saltmarsh Sparrows. But it was the Black Skimmer flock that stole the show! Usually more nocturnal feeders, we witnessed several of them wheeling around and slicing through the water's surface in the tidal creek alongside our vehicles—one of many fine memories we'd take with us from this amazing week.

ITINERARY

Day 1, May 8: Arrival in Philadelphia; group meeting at 6:00 pm; dinner at Ruby Tuesday.

Day 2, May 9: John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum; lunch at Lucky Bones Back Water Grille, Cape May; Michael and Louise's yard, West Cape May; Lily Lake, Cape May Point; dinner at Blue Pig Tavern, Cape May.

Day 3, May 10: Coral Avenue Dune Crossing Spring Watch, Cape May Point; Seagrove Avenue entrance to the Grove and Red Trail, Cape May Point State Park; Shell Bay and Bennys landings, Cape May Court House; dinner at Sapore Italiano, West Cape May.

Day 4, May 11: Belleplain State Forest (Field Office, Frank's Road, Pine Swamp Road, Dean's Branch Road, and Nummy Lake); Cook's Beach; Dennis Creek WMA Conswell Road "ghost forest"; dinner at Oyster Bay, Cape May; Chimney Swift viewing at Our Lady Star of the Sea, Cape May City.

Day 5, May 12: Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area; Saltmarsh Safari to Jarvis Sound on *The Osprey* with Captain Bob Lubberman and Mark Garland; NJ Audubon Nature Center of Cape May; NJ Audubon Cape May Bird Observatory Northwood Center and Lily Lake, Cape May Point; South Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge's Cove Pool; dinner at Freda's Café, Cape May.

Day 6, May 13: The Nature Conservancy's South Cape May Meadows; Ocean City Welcome Center Heronry; E.B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge's Wildlife Drive; return to Philadelphia.

Day 7, May 14: Departures from Philadelphia.



American Robin and the Cape May Point lighthouse ©Michael O'Brien

KEY

N = Nest observed

Y = Dependent young observed

BIRDS

Waterfowl (*Anatidae*)

Brant (*Branta bernicla*) – This high arctic breeder typically lingers well into May. They were numerous in the back bays, where we saw many from the *Osprey*.



Brant ©Michael O'Brien

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) (Y) – Seen daily

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) (Y) – Introduced and thriving; there were territorial pairs in several locations

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) – 6 at John Heinz NWR, plus 2 flyovers at South Cape May Meadows

Blue-winged Teal (*Spatula discors*) – 2 pairs: 1 at Forsythe NWR and 1 at South Cape May Meadows

Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*) – 1 pair at South Cape May Meadows

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Seen daily

Mallard x American Black Duck (*Anas platyrhynchos* x *rubripes*) – 1 at South Cape May Meadows lead to an informative discussion about duck hybridization with Michael

American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) – Breeds in coastal marshes; seen in multiple locations with a maximum of 50 at Forsythe NWR

Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – 1 in the Delaware Bay, seen from Coral Avenue dune crossing

Black Scoter (*Melanitta americana*) – 15 in the Delaware Bay, seen from Coral Avenue dune crossing

Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies (Phasianidae)

Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – 2 roadside sightings near Belleplain SF

Pigeons and Doves (Columbidae)

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) (I) – Seen daily

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) – Seen daily

Cuckoos (Cuculidae)

Black-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*) – 1 flyover at Higbee Beach WMA

Swifts (Apodidae)

Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*) – Seen every day; cool temperatures caused many to stay low.
Witnessed about 150 circling around before going to roost an old church in Cape May.

Hummingbirds (Trochilidae)

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) – Seen at a few locations, particularly well at Michael and Louise's garden and the Belleplain SF field office. Marveled at a couple of northbound migrants making landfall from Delaware Bay at Coral Avenue dune crossing.

Rails, Gallinules and Coots (Rallidae)

Clapper Rail (*Rallus crepitans*) – Awesome views of at several at Bennys Landing due to extreme high tides; more typical brief views from the Osprey and at Forsythe NWR; heard elsewhere



Clapper Rail with nowhere to hide in flooded marsh ©Michael O'Brien

Oystercatchers (*Haematopodidae*)

American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*) – 14 seen from the *Osprey*; a few pairs observed around Cape Island and Ocean City

Plovers and Lapwings (*Charadriidae*)

Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Nice views of 30 from the *Osprey* and 8 at Bennys Landing

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) (N) – 2 sightings, both at South Cape May Meadows. Had a peek at a nest with 4 perfect eggs nestled within the bike rack in the gravel parking area.

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Seen at several locations, most surprising were the 120 in a newly plowed field on Bayshore Road, Cape Island

Sandpipers and Allies (*Scolopacidae*)

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) – High numbers for the late date: there were 150 seen from Shellbay and Bennys landings, plus 1 from the *Osprey* and about 30 flybys at Forsythe NWR

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) – Small numbers at multiple locations; our favorite sighting was of 4 birds digging holes at Forsythe NWR

Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*) – Shockingly low numbers due to cold water temperatures caused by the Nor'easter: 1 at Bennys Landing and good views of 5 from the *Osprey* at Cape May Harbor.



Red Knots with Short-billed Dowitcher and Sanderling ©Michael O'Brien

Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*) – 6 South Cape May Meadows

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) – Seen in several places, including close views at Cook's Beach of a variety

of plumages

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) – 5 at Bennys Landing, a couple at Cook's Beach, great views of about 150 from the *Osprey*; then got totally wowed by about 1200 at Forsythe NWR



Dunlin ©Michael O'Brien

Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*) – Close views of a dozen at Coral Avenue jetty, Cape May Point

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) – Seen at several locations; nice comparisons with Semipalmated Sandpipers at Forsythe NWR

Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) – Low numbers this year: just 1 seen from the *Osprey* and 2 at Cook's Beach, before finally seeing about 40 at Forsythe NWR

Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*) – Or as Michael would call them, “Red-necked Dowitcher”; seen in several locations, best from the *Osprey*

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*) – 1 at John Heinz NWR, 1 from the *Osprey*, and 3 along the edge of the Wildlife Drive at Forsythe NWR

Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*) – It was a wonderful surprise to find a couple in a rain pool at John Heinz NWR at the very beginning of the tour.

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Small numbers seen daily

Willet (*Tringa semipalmata*) – Seen on most days; all were of the “Eastern” subspecies which breeds in coastal saltmarsh. They are wonderfully flashy and vocal this time of year.

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) – There were at least 50 at Forsythe NWR, but our best study was of a single lesser with a greater at Benny's Landing.

Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers (*Laridae*)

Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroicocephalus Philadelphia*) – Much more numerous than usual due to persistent

northeast winds pushing birds in from offshore; maximum of 50 at South Cape May Meadows.

LITTLE GULL (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) – Amazing find from the *Osprey*! This immature bird was found roosting on a spit in Cape May Harbor, likely pushed ashore by windy conditions.

Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Abundant and highly visible. Cape May has the largest concentration of these handsome gulls during their breeding season.

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) – Numerous in the winter months, uncommon in summer; 5 at John Heinz NWR and about a dozen at Forsythe NWR

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) (N) – Seen daily

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) – A few around Cape May beaches with a maximum of 10 at South Cape May Meadows (Cove Pool end). This primarily Eurasian species is not known to breed in North America but is regular and increasing as a nonbreeding visitor, likely from nesting areas in Greenland.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) (N) – Seen daily

Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*) – Unusually low numbers due to the northeasterly conditions displacing birds off of coastal beaches. Singles observed at Coral Avenue dune crossing, South Cape May Meadows, and Cape May Harbor.

Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – An uncommon summer resident, we had excellent views of 6 at Shell Bay Landing and 5 at Forsythe NWR.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) – Large numbers in the backbay marshes, seen well from the *Osprey*.

Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*) – Common; seen at most coastal locations

Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*) – We enjoyed close views of a large flock of about 80 roosting at Forsythe NWR. We even saw some skimming, something they do more often at night than during the day.



Black Skimmers ©Michael O'Brien

Loons (*Gaviidae*)

Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*) – Surprisingly high numbers for this late in the season, no doubt due to unusually low water temperatures enticing them to linger. 5 at Coral Avenue dune crossing and 1 seen well from the *Osprey*.



Red-throated Loon ©Michael O'Brien

Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) – 1 seen from Coral Avenue dune crossing, 1 at Forsythe NWR, and 16 from the *Osprey* (some offering close views)

Boobies and Gannets (*Sulidae*)

Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) – 1 distant yet distinctive flyby at Cape May Point

Cormorants (*Phalacrocoracidae*)

Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Common spring migrant; seen in most birding locations, including about 200 at John Heinz NWR

Hérons, Egrets and Bitterns (*Ardeidae*)

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) – 2 at John Heinz NWR, 1 fly over at Cape May Point, and 2 at Forsythe NWR

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) (N) – Seen daily; numerous on marsh edges, sheltered from the northeasterly winds. We observed nesting pairs with eggs at Ocean City Welcome Center heronry.

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) – Seen daily

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) – 2 at Shell Bay Landing

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*) – Singles at Shell Bay and Bennys landings, plus another at Cook's

Beach.

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) (N) – 10 at Ocean City Welcome Center heronry

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) (N) – 20 at Ocean City Welcome Center heronry

Ibises and Spoonbills (*Threskiornithidae*)

White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) – This southern species has historically been a rare vagrant in New Jersey, but numbers have increased dramatically over the past few years. We observed about 60 at Ocean City Welcome Center heronry, where they now nest.

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Singles at Shell Bay Landing and Cook's Beach, numerous at Ocean City Welcome Center heronry

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – A rare visitor from the west, we saw 1 in the Ocean City Welcome Center heronry.



White-faced Ibis ©Michael O'Brien

New World Vultures (*Cathartidae*)

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) – Seen daily

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) – Seen daily

Osprey (*Pandionidae*)

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Increasingly common breeder, though windy conditions affected their ability to hunt; we observed them carrying White Crappie, Needlefish, and Atlantic Menhaden.

Hawks, Eagles and Kites (*Accipitridae*)

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – 3 at John Heinz

Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) – 1 beautiful flyover at John Heinz NWR
Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) – 1 migrant seen from Michael and Louise’s yard
Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Seen in a few locations (generally while en route): best view of 1 being mobbed by crows at Belleplain

Kingfishers (*Alcedinidae*)

Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – 1 from the *Osprey* at the Cape May Canal (where a pair likely breeds) and 1 heard at Lily Lake, Cape May Point

Woodpeckers (*Picidae*)

Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) – 1 in the “ghost forest” at Dennis Creek WMA

Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – Seen or heard daily; best views in Michael and Louise’s yard where they visited the orange feeder



Red-bellied Woodpecker at orange feeder ©Michael O'Brien

Downy Woodpecker (*Dryobates pubescens*) – Excellent views of a pair at John Heinz NWR

Hairy Woodpecker (*Dryobates villosus*) – Heard at Belleplain SF and Forsythe NWR

Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) – Singles at John Heinz NWR and at Dennis Creek WMA; heard elsewhere

Falcons and Caracaras (*Falconidae*)

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) – 1 northbound migrant sped past us at Coral Avenue dune crossing

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) – 1 seen from the *Osprey*, perched on the US Coast Guard

Station's water tower

Tyrant Flycatchers (*Tyrannidae*)

Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*) – Scope views in Belleplain SF

Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax trailii*) – 1 in Michael and Louise's meadow

Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*) – 1 at John Heinz NWR

Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) (N) – 1 at John Heinz NWR, a nest at Belleplain SF field office, and 2 in the picnic area at Forsythe NWR

Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) – Seen or heard every day; best views were of a “nesty” pair at John Heinz NWR



Great Crested Flycatcher ©Michael O'Brien

Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) – Seen every day, including a field full at Higbee Beach WMA

Vireos (*Vireonidae*)

White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) – Seen at Higbee Beach WMA; heard at Forsythe NWR

Blue-headed Vireo (*Vireo solitaries*) – 2 heard at Cape May Point State Park

Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) – 3 at John Heinz NWR

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*) – Heard at John Heinz NWR; seen at Belleplain SF

Crows, Jays, and Magpies (*Corvidae*)

Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Seen daily; they love the local oak forests

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Seen on all but the last day

Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Seen daily

Tits, Chickadees, & Titmice (*Paridae*)

Carolina Chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*) (N) – Seen daily; best at Michael and Louise’s feeders

Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – Seen in most wooded locations; best at Cape May Point State Park

Swallows (*Hirundinidae*)

Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) – Nice studies of 15 feeding low over the water at Lily Lake, Cape May Point.

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) (N) – Seen daily, including several at their nest boxes

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – 5 hunting at Darby Creek, John Heinz NWR, and 1 at Lily Lake

Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) (N) – There are a number of colonies in the Cape May area, but their nesting had to be put on hold due to poor feeding conditions. We saw groups of “grounded” individuals trying to conserve energy as they huddled out of the wind.



Purple Martins trying to stay warm out of the wind ©Michael O'Brien

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) – Seen daily

Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – 1 at Lily Lake, Cape May Point

Waxwings (*Bombacillidae*)

Cedar Waxwing (*Bombacilla cedrorum*) – Nice views of 10 at John Heinz NWR and 2 at Forsythe NWR

Nuthatches (*Sittidae*)

White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*) – 1 heard in Belleplain SF

Gnatcatchers (*Poliophtilidae*)

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – 2 at John Heinz NWR, 1 at Cape May Point SP, and heard at Belleplain SF

Wrens (*Troglodytidae*)

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) – 3 at John Heinz NWR and 1 at Forsythe NWR

Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) – 2 in the cattails at John Heinz NWR

Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – Heard daily; good views at Cape May Point State Park

Mockingbirds and Thrashers (*Mimidae*)

Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Seen daily; excellent views at John Heinz NWR and Belleplain SF



Gray Catbird ©Michael O'Brien

Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) – Scope views of a singing bird at South Cape May Meadows

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Seen daily

Starlings (*Sturnidae*)

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Seen daily

Thrushes and Allies (*Turdidae*)

Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) (N) – Nesting pair at Belleplain SF field office

Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) – Heard in Belleplain SF

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) – Seen daily

Old World Sparrows (*Passeridae*)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) (N) – Seen daily

Finches, Euphonias, and Allies (*Fringillidae*)

House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Seen daily

American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) – Seen at several locations; best views at John Heinz NWR

New World Sparrows (*Passerellidae*)

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) (N) – Seen most days; observed a pair building a nest at Belleplain SF field office

Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*) – Close views at South Cape May Meadows

White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – An uncommon migrant, we saw singles at John Heinz NWR and Cape May Bird Observatory Northwood Center

White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – Common in winter, their numbers dwindle quickly in spring but they lingered late this year due to cold conditions; seen daily.

Seaside Sparrow (*Ammodramus maritima*) – Nice views at Cook's Beach and Forsythe NWR



Seaside Sparrow ©Michael O'Brien

Saltmarsh Sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacutus*) – 2 at Forsythe NWR

Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Singles at Bennys Landing, South Cape May

Meadows, and Forsythe NWR

Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) – Seen at a few locations; one of our first birds at John Heinz NWR

Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) – 1 at Coral Avenue dune crossing, plus heard in the dunes at South Cape May Meadows

Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteridae*)

Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) – Scope views of a wonderful songster at South Cape May Meadows

Troupials and Allies (*Icteridae*)

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – 2 at Higbee Beach WMA

Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) – Seen at several locations; best at Michael and Louise's feeders

Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) – A real treat, Michael and Louise were hosting 6 at their feeders!



Baltimore Oriole at jelly feeder ©Michael O'Brien

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Seen daily

Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) – Seen daily

Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Seen daily

Boat-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus major*) – Locally numerous in saltmarsh habitats, including Bennys Landing and during the Osprey cruise

New World Warblers (*Parulidae*)

Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – Seen or heard daily, with many singing at Belleplain SF; best views

at Cape May Point State Park

Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) – 1 at Cape May Point State Park

Northern Waterthrush (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – Heard at John Heinz NWR and South Cape May Meadows

Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) – 2 at John Heinz NWR, 3 at Cape May Point SP, and 1 at Belleplain SF

Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*) – 1 at Lake Nummy, Belleplain SF

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Seen at several locations

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Heard at John Heinz NWR and Higbee Beach WMA

Northern Parula (*Setophaga americana*) – 1 at John Heinz NWR and 1 at Cape May Point SP: heard at other locations

Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) – Excellent views at John Heinz NWR; heard at South Cape May Meadows and Forsythe NWR

Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) – 1 at John Heinz NWR

Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – 2 at John Heinz NWR

Pine Warbler (*Setophaga pinus*) – 2 at Coral Avenue dune crossing, 1 at Cape May Point State Park, and 5 in Belleplain SF



Pine Warbler ©Michael O'Brien

Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Setophaga coronata*) – 3 at John Heinz NWR (best views), 1 at La Mer, and 1 at Forsythe NWR

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Setophaga dominica*) – Nice views in Belleplain SF field office

Prairie Warbler (*Setophaga discolor*) – 1 at John Heinz NWR, 2 heard at Higbee Beach WMA, and 1 at South Cape May Meadows

Cardinals and Allies (*Cardinalidae*)

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) – Handsome immature male singing at Belleplain SF field office

Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) – Scope views at John Heinz NWR

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Seen daily



Northern Cardinal ©Michael O'Brien

Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – 1 in Michael and Louise's yard and 2 at Cape May Bird Observatory Northwood

Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*) – Seen in several locations, all obliging individuals

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) – Seen at several locations; best at Higbee Beach WMA

MAMMALS

Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Seen at several locations

Woodchuck (*Marmota monax*) – A few seen en route

Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – Seen daily

White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – 1 seen en route to Cape May

Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) – Several in the Delaware Bay off Cape May Point

REPTILES and AMPHIBIANS

Black Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*)

Northern Diamondback Terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin terrapin*)
Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)
Eastern Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta picta*)
Northern Cricket Frog (*Acris crepitans crepitans*) – heard
Cope’s (Southern) Gray Treefrog (*Hyla chrysoscelis*) – heard

BUTTERFLIES

Orange Sulphur (*Colias eurytheme*) – Michael and Louise’s meadow
Henry’s Elfin (*Callophrys henrici*) – Belleplain SF
Summer Azure (*Celastrina neglecta*) – Belleplain SF
Pearl Crescent (*Phyciodes tharos*) – Michael and Louise’s garden
Juvenal’s Duskywing (*Erynnis juvenalis*) – Belleplain SF

DAMSELFLIES and DRAGONFLIES

Ashy Clubtail (*Gomphus lividus*) – Belleplain SF



Ashy Clubtail ©Michael O'Brien